10¢
COMPLETE QUICK-TRIGGER STORIES
POPULAR
NOV.
WESTERN
A THRILLING PUBLICATION
GUN MARSHAL OF WOLF CITY
An Action Novelet
By JOHN A. THOMPSON
SMITHS RIDE FAST
A Sheriff Blue Steele Novelet
By TOM GUNN
RED RUNS THE WAR TRAIL
A Buffalo Billy Story
By SCOTT CARLETON
BUY WAR BONDS AND STAMPS FOR VICTORY!

LIGHTER MOMENTS with fresh Eveready Batteries

"Your bawth is drawn, m'Lord!"

IF YOU ARE finding it difficult to buy "Eveready" flashlight batteries this is the reason. Nearly all we make are going to the Armed Forces and to essential war industries. This leaves very few of these long-life, dependable flashlight batteries for civilian consumers.

Back up our hard hitting Infantry boys with War Bonds. Buy all you can afford.

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER . . . Look for the date line ⟶

EVEREADY
TRADE-MARK

The registered trade-mark "Eveready" distinguishes products of National Carbon Company, Inc.

Reduce your Rupture Worries!

Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry and fear—if we can help you? Learn NOW about this perfected truss-invention for most forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire . . . you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy most of life's activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting fear of Rupture lessened in your thoughts! Literally *thousands* of Rupture sufferers *have* entered this *Kingdom of Paradise Regained.* Perhaps we can do as much for you. Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, do not *despair.* The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support Gives *Wonderful Protection*

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that permits Nature to do her part in many cases—that helps hold most ruptures securely but gently, day and night. Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for results beyond the expectations of the writers. What is this invention—how does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Air-Cushion Appliance—send now for *free* Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy this remarkable, LOW-PRICED rupture invention. But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks Air-Cushion truss is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust and corrode. It brings heavenly comfort and security in 'most all cases—while the Air-Cushion continually works in its own unique way! Learn what this patented invention may mean to you—send the coupon quick!

C. E. BROOKS, Inventor

SENT ON TRIAL!

No . . . don't order a Brooks now . . . FIRST get the complete, revealing explanation of this world-famous invention. THEN decide whether you want to try for the comfort—the wonderful degree of freedom—the security—the blessed relief that thousands of men, women and children have reported. They found our invention the answer to their prayers! And you risk nothing in making the test, as the complete appliance is SENT ON TRIAL. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this no-risk trial. Send for the facts—now—today—hurry! All correspondence strictly confidential.

FREE! Latest Rupture Book Explains All!

Sent You in Plain Envelope **JUST CLIP and SEND COUPON ➡**

Brooks Appliance Co., 182R State St., Marshall, Mich.

PROOF!

Read These Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases

(In our files at Marshall, Michigan, we have over 44,000 grateful letters which have come to us entirely unsolicited and without any sort of payment.)

Never Loses a Day's Work in Shipyard

"A few weeks ago I received the Appliance you made for me. Wouldn't do without it now. My fellow workers notice how much better I can do my work and get around over these ships—and believe me, the work in a Navy shipyard is anything but easy. I never lose a day's work now."—J. A. Comer, 1505 Green Ave., Orange, Texas.

Perfect Relief—Full Satisfaction

"Your truss gives FULL SATISFACTION. I feel it my moral duty to testify to the world:—(A)—That I have been ruptured 45 years. (B)—was operated on scientifically ten years ago when 76 years of age; but the rupture returned soon. Have tried everything; but only now do I find PERFECT RELIEF in your appliance."—Lee R. Stroud, 601 E. Grove St., Kaufman, Texas.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
182R State St., Marshall, Mich.

Without obligation, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER—all in plain envelope.

Name .....

Street .....

City..... State.....

State whether for Man ☐ Woman ☐ or Child ☐

TO OUR READERS: Our new easy-to-read space-saving type conserves paper in conformity with government rationing — and there is NO REDUCTION in reading matter.

POPULAR WESTERN

Vol. XXVII, No. 3 EVERY STORY BRAND NEW November, 1944

A Complete Action Novelet

GUN MARSHAL OF WOLF CITY

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

Zeke Peasly brings his own Texas brand of law to the toughest gold camp in the snow-bound North—and fights a lone battle against grim desperadoes bent on his destruction! 11

Other Full-Length Novelets

SMITHS RIDE FAST . . . . . Tom Gunn 34

When a traveling hombre lights into Sheriff Blue Steele's bailiwick and tries to operate a slick swindle scheme, justice guns roar!

RETRIBUTION AT FARO FLATS . . . . . T. W. Ford 54

Hondo Wing, mistaken for a fighting marshal, accepts the gunfire challenge—and faces bitter foes in savage combat!

Quick-Trigger Short Stories

TRIGGER SAVVY . . . . . Chuck Martin 25

Deputy Johnny Siler had his own way of dealing with border wolves

KILL THY NEIGHBOR . . . . . Dan Kirby 31

Sheriff "Handy" Ames has a big surprise for Jud Cragg

RED RUNS THE WAR TRAIL . . . . . Scott Carleton 47

Fighting Scout Buffalo Billy Bates battles to rescue a captured girl

RIDE A DEAD HORSE . . . . . Jack Sterrett 66

Marv Taylor had to prove his innocence in the face of grim peril

and

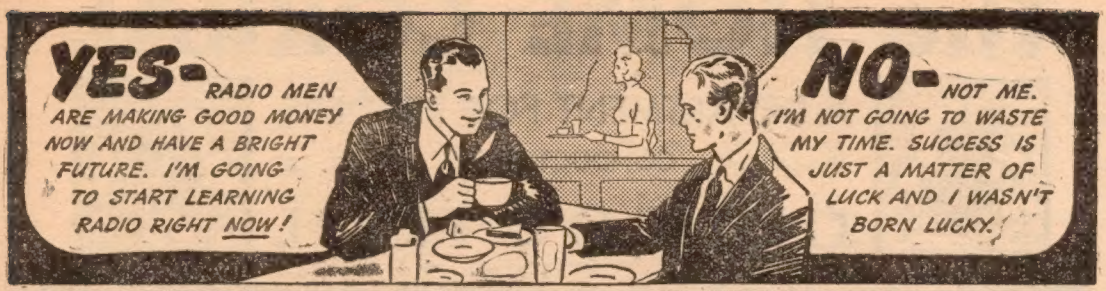
THE HOME CORRAL . . . . . Old Doc Trail 6

Join POPULAR WESTERN CLUB! Coupon on Page 78

POPULAR WESTERN, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), $1.20; single copies, $.10. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter March 21, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.
Copyrighted, 1944, by Better Publications, Inc.
Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. 173

Read our companion magazines: Thrilling Western, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Love, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Football, Popular Detective, Popular Sports Magazine, Air War, Popular Love, Popular Football, Texas Rangers, G-Men Detective, Sky Fighters, The Phantom Detective, Everyday Astrology, West, Detective Novel Magazine, Masked Rider Western, Range Riders Western, The Rio Kid Western, Black Book Detective, Startling Stories, Popular Crossword Puzzles, Best Crossword Puzzles, Rodeo Romances, Army Navy Flying Stories, Exciting Love, Exciting Sports, and Exciting Western.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.


YES- RADIO MEN ARE MAKING GOOD MONEY NOW AND HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE. I'M GOING TO START LEARNING RADIO RIGHT NOW!
NO- NOT ME. I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY TIME. SUCCESS IS JUST A MATTER OF LUCK AND I WASN'T BORN LUCKY.

BILL SAID "YES" HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY IN RADIO NOW
THE N.R.I. COURSE IS PRACTICAL. I'M MAKING $5 TO $10 A WEEK FIXING RADIOS IN SPARE TIME WHILE LEARNING
YOU SURE KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER
THANKS. I'M A FULL TIME RADIO TECHNICIAN NOW. N.R.I. HELPS A FELLOW JUMP HIS PAY
BILL, I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE WON SUCCESS SO FAST IN RADIO
YES! I'M MAKING GOOD MONEY THANKS TO N.R.I. AND WE HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE

TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"
BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME
SAME OLD GRIND- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO
GUESS I'M A FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE
YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WISHING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE

BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

I Will Train You at Home

Here's your opportunity to get a good job in a busy field with a bright peacetime future! Mail Coupon. Get my 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio" FREE.

Big Demand Now For Well Trained Radio Technicians, Operators

Keeping Radios working is booming Radio Repair business. After-the-war prospects are bright too. Think of the boom in Radio Sales and Servicing when new Radios are available—when Electronics and Television start their post-war expansion!

Broadcasting Stations, Aviation Radio, Police Radio, Loudspeaker Systems, Radio Manufacturing all offer good jobs now—and most of these fields have a *big backlog* of business that has built up during the war.

Many Beginners Soon Make $5, $10 a Week EXTRA in Spare Time

The day you enroll I start sending you EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that help show how to make EXTRA money fixing Radios in spare time while still learning. You LEARN Radio fundamentals from my easy-to-grasp lessons—PRACTICE what you learn by building Radio Circuits with parts I furnish—and USE your knowledge to make EXTRA money.

Find Out what N.R.I. Can Do For You

MAIL COUPON to get my book. Read details about my Course—"50-50 Training Method"—8 Experimental Kits—EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS. Read letters from men I trained telling what they are doing, earning. No obligation. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or pasted on a penny postal!—**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 4MO9, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.**

My Radio Course Includes:
TELEVISION • ELECTRONICS
FREQUENCY MODULATION

You Get 6 Big Kits of Radio Parts

By the time you've conducted 60 sets of Experiments with Radio Parts I supply—have made hundreds of measurements and adjustments—you'll have valuable PRACTICAL experience. The superheterodyne circuit shown here is just one unit you build. It will bring in local and distant stations.

THIS **FREE** BOOK HAS SHOWN HUNDREDS HOW TO MAKE GOOD MONEY

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 4MO9
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book: "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

NAME ..... AGE.....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE.....

The HOME CORRAL

A DEPARTMENT FOR READERS

CONDUCTED BY

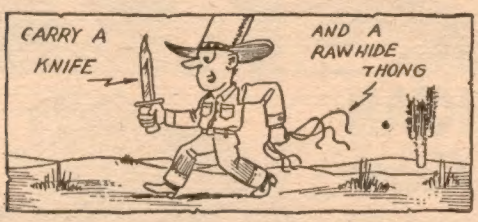
OLD DOC TRAIL

HOWDY, hombres and hombresses! How'd you like some straight information on the subject of rattlesnakes? Don't like snakes? Well, who does? But we've got to put up with 'em under Western conditions. So let's try to understand the reptile better.

For close onto a half-century, afoot and hossback, I've prowled, hunted, fished, climbed and explored the lonely places of the West and am still doing it. In that time I've come onto sizzletails under every imaginable circumstance. The figure probably runs into the hundreds. Twice I stepped on coiled rattlers.

I want to tell you that I believe more folks die from stepping in and out of slippery bathtubs than from stepping on snakes. You're in more danger on any highway than in the most snake-infested region, because a drunk or dozing or showoff driver is a bigger menace than a whole barrelful of venomous varmints.

So if you're skeered of snakes—and most normal human beings are—what I'm going to tell you will help chase away those fears.



What I offer aren't exaggerated yarns but my own personal experiences with and among snakes, plus a few other experiences so closely linked to my own that I can vouch for the truth of them.

Senor Sizzletail

As you may know, heaps of nonsense has been written and told about the deadly rattler. The boiled-down truth is that Senor Sizzletail is a gentleman who aims to tend his own business and leave you plumb alone.

To start off with, here are four rules that I go by in snake country. I think you'll find 'em useful and different than most "book talk."

1. AT ALL TIMES CARRY A SHARP KNIFE AND A RAWHIDE THONG. Your best protection is a quick incision, a tourniquet just above the bite to slow the blood circulation and sucking the venom from the wound. That's all the treatment necessary in most snakebite cases.

2. MOVE SLOWLY WHEN AFOOT. Remember, the snake fears you as much or more than you fear him. Give him a fair chance and he'll get out of your way. Travel easy in rocks or brush and he'll have time to do this, or else sound his warning so you can avoid him.

3. NEVER REACH OR STOOP CARELESSLY IN CAMP OR ELSEWHERE. It's my observation that most bites by far are on hand or arm. And they're the most dangerous bites, with little or no clothing between to intercept the venom.

4. FIGHT FEAR. It's claimed that many snakebite "victims" die of panicky fear and that I firmly believe. A lurking, ever-present fear makes you a poor trail companion, also deprives you of much wholesome enjoyment in the open. The Scriptures say that what thou fearest is most likely to come upon you. I have a snake story that bears out that great truth.

But right now let me tell you about the first time I stepped on a rattlesnake. The place, Old Arizona. The time? Well, Arizona was still a Territory. I was 14 years old that summer and all wrapped up in collecting birds' eggs.

In a thorny mesquite thicket I found a roadrunner's nest and was hoofing back to the waiting horse and buckboard with the prized eggs, three of them.

Some Sound Effect!

The country I knew well, for I had hunted over it much in season. In fact I was following a cow trail that I had passed along more'n once. With eyes glued to the dark-specked, almost conical-shaped eggs of the desert cuckoo cupped carefully in my hand, my hastening foot came down on something squirmy. The sound effect was as instant as though I'd touched an electric buzzer.

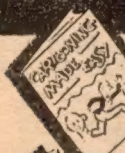
In the next one-millionth of a second, I jumped higher than the famous Jim Thorpe ever jumped in making a world's record.

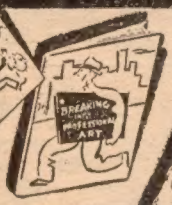
(Continued on page 8)

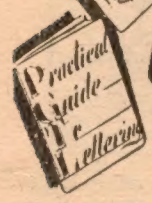
9 SECTIONS
– A $9 VALUE
ALL FOR ONLY
$1

IT'S Fun TO DRAW

A COMPLETE SELF-INSTRUCTION COURSE AND REFERENCE BOOK with over 1000 "How-to-do-it" SKETCHES and DRAWINGS







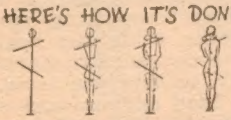
ANYONE WHO HAS LEARNED TO WRITE can learn to draw! This helpful book removes the mysticism that has surrounded art. By reducing the elements of drawing to its simple steps, it teaches **THE BEGINNER** to draw, and then to advance into more difficult subjects.

The illustrations show the 9 **BRANCHES OF PRACTICAL ART** which this book covers. No previous knowledge on your part is expected. Within a few days you will be drawing with an ease and enjoyment you never thought possible. For the professional artist, it is a **REFERENCE BOOK** and veritable mine of information.

This book guides you from the first stroke on paper to selling the finished art. Includes specific instruction on: Still Life, Anatomy, Human Figure, Faces, Portraits, Cartooning, Advertising, Lettering, Commercial Art, Illustrations, etc. Teaches you to draw: Hands, feet, heads, bodies, ears, noses, mouths, eyes;—how to express: Laughter, anger, terror, grief, etc.;—how to attain: Balance, composition, symmetry, shading, action, movement. Also how to letter with **37 COMPLETE ALPHABETS.** And how to draw cartoons, caricatures and comic drawings. Includes glossary, etc.

To make it generally available, we have set the special price of $1. If not delighted, money back. Merely mail the coupon.

HERE'S HOW IT'S DONE!



MAIL COUPON NOW Merely mail the coupon below. When your copy of *It's Fun To Draw* arrives—read and test it for 5 days. If, after this examination, it hasn't opened up new paths of fun and artistic ability for you—return it, and it won't cost you a single penny. If you decide to keep it, the FULL PRICE *is only* $1.00.

KNICKERBOCKER PUB. CO., 120 Greenwich St., New York 6, N.Y.

ONLY **$1** FOR THE COMPLETE COURSE

5 DAYS FREE TRIAL

KNICKERBOCKER PUB. CO.
Dept. D-1404, 120 Greenwich St., New York 6, N.Y.

Rush me a copy of "It's Fun to Draw!" If it hasn't opened up new paths of fun and artistic ability for me, I may return it and it won't cost me a single penny.

☐ I enclose $1.00 in full payment.
☐ Send C.O.D. I'll pay postman $1.00 plus 38¢ C.O.D. postage and money order fees.

Name .....

Address ..... State .....

City .....

HANDKERCHIEF TEST

PROVES VITAL ZONE SPOTLESS AND FREE FROM "GOO"—*no matter how often you smoke it!* WDC

HESSON GUARD
MILANO

WEDDING AND ENGAGEMENT RING BARGAIN

TEN DAYS' TRIAL — SEND NO MONEY

Introductory Offer: With every order for smart, new, Sterling Silver Solitaire engagement ring we will include without extra charge exquisite wedding ring set with eight imitation diamonds matching in fire and brilliance the beautiful imitation Diamond solitaire engagement ring (the perfect bridal pair).

Send no money with order. Just name, address and ring size. We ship both rings in lovely gift box immediately and you make just 2 easy payments of $2 each, total only $4. We trust you. No red tape as you make first payment and 20% Federal tax to postman on arrival then balance any time within 30 days. Money-back guarantee. War conditions make supply limited. Act NOW.

EMPIRE DIAMOND COMPANY
DEPT. ST-205 JEFFERSON, IOWA

THE HOME CORRAL

(Continued from page 6)

Well, that snake may be out there rattling yet. I never did go back to find out. So far as I can remember, that was the first rattler that I ever actually touched. Oh yes, I forgot to mention that I was *barefoot!*

The roadrunner eggs? The surprising thing, hombres and hombresses, is that they came through all right. I hit the buckboard seat with 'em still nested in my hand.

A good many years passed before I stepped on my second snake. That happened on the shore of a mountain lake and the season was late April. I'm sure about that, because the opening day of fishing season, May 1, was near. I'd left the road to cross a little grass flat to the water's edge to see if I could see any fish.

After a short looksee, I headed back for the road. In going to the lake I'd proceeded

with usual caution through the ankle-high grama grass, for it was a warm, sunny day and burrowing rodents were at work on the grass flat and I knew it was snaketime.

But on my return to the road I was less vigilant, for I retraced my own steps made no more'n five minutes before. Stepping square onto one of my own footprints I again set foot on something that squished and sizzled.

I wasn't barefoot this time, but wore rubber-bottomed hiking shoes. The snake fanged rubber the first lick, a quarter-inch from my left big toe. I jumped and when I came down the snake made a second pass through my flapping pants leg.

Well, they were purty good pants so to be careful with 'em I jumped again and did it in a way to light out of snakereach. By the time I found a throwing rock, the indignant snake had crawled off into a brush clump, where he hid and cussed me with his tail for a long while.

A few days later, not far from there, a cowpuncher was mending fence. He dropped his hammer and stooped to reach for it. Zing! Something stung the fleshy base of his thumb. The cowpuncher stared with horror at two tiny, telltale punctures.

He lost his head and ran and went into a tantrum of fright. He died less than two hours later on the way in to town and a hospital. which sort of proves what I've said; that if struck through boots or clothing, he might have lived. There's no doubt but that most fatal bites are on hand or arm.

Another Close Shave

I had a third uncomfortably close shave with friend *crotalus* only a few weeks back in a Mojave wash. Had just peeled off my

(Continued on page 74)

CASH WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST!

AMAZING NEW

GOLD SEAL POLICY

$1 COSTS LESS THAN a month

✓ **PAYS** accumulated **CASH BENEFITS** For Accidental Loss of Life, Limb, or Sight up to **$6000.00**

✓ **ACCIDENT BENEFITS** For Accident Disability, policy pays up to $100 a month for as long as 24 months, or **$2400.00**

✓ **SICKNESS BENEFITS** For Sickness Disability, policy pays a maximum monthly income up to .. **$100.00 PER MO.**

✓ **HOSPITAL EXPENSES** Policy pays for "hospitalization" from either *sickness* or *accident*, including room at $5.00 per day, to over .. **$650.00**

All Around PROTECTION! . . .

Cash for almost every emergency! Benefits that are big enough to be worthwhile . . . yet, this extra-liberal "Gold Seal" Policy, issued by old-line LEGAL RESERVE Service Life Insurance Company *actually costs less than $1 per month.* Here is the protection you *need,* and should have, *at a price you CAN afford.* It is an extra-liberal policy that provides QUICK CASH to pay doctor bills, hospital bills, for medicines, for loss of time and other pressing demands for cash that invariably come when sickness or accident strikes.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION REQUIRED!

No red tape! Fast Service! Policy issued *BY MAIL* at *big savings* to men and women, ages 15 to 69. Actual policy sent for 10 Days' FREE Examination. Write for it today. No cost. No obligation. No salesman will call. Use coupon below. Do it today! Provide for tomorrow!

DON'T TAKE CHANCES! Act Today! Tomorrow May Be Too Late!

Here is a policy that pays, as specified, for *ANY and ALL accidents, ALL the* common sicknesses, even for minor injuries; and pays disability benefits from the very first day. *NO waiting period.* NO, this is not the usual "limited" policy. There are NO trick clauses! NO jokers! NO red tape! You don't have to pay to see this policy. Just send us your *name, age* and *name of beneficiary* and we'll send you the policy for 10 DAYS' FREE INSPECTION. No cost. No obligation. No salesman will call.

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
446-D SERVICE LIFE BUILDING **Omaha 2, Nebraska**

FREE 10-DAY INSPECTION COUPON

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
446-D Service Life Bldg., Omaha 2, Nebraska

SEND without cost or obligation your extra-liberal "Gold Seal" $1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 Days' Free Inspection.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....AGE.....

CITY.....STATE.....

BENEFICIARY.....

Would you give less than 7¢ a day for Music Lessons?

Yes! That's all it costs!

Amazing Print and Picture Method Teaches Thousands to Play in Their Own Homes

THINK of it! For just about the few pennies you spend for your daily newspapers, YOU CAN LEARN MUSIC! You can learn to play your favorite musical instrument. *Any* instrument—piano, saxophone, violin, guitar, accordion, etc. What's more, you can learn right in your own home, in spare time!

Actually, your music lessons cost less than 7c a day. And that includes *everything*—instruction, sheet music, personal Advisory Service. No extras of any kind, nothing more to pay.

Didn't Dream She Could Learn So Quickly!

"I DIDN'T dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. . . . I had always heard it couldn't be done. You can imagine my surprise when after 3 or 4 weeks I found I could play real tunes. Now when I play people will hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time. Any person who takes your piano course and studies it cannot help but learn to play."—* *H. C. S., California.*

FOUND ACCORDION EASY

"I've always wanted to play the piano accordion," writes **H. E. from Canada.* "But thought I'd never learn it. Then I read about your lessons. I don't know how to express my satisfaction."

AMAZED FRIENDS

"This course has been very interesting. Words cannot express how I have enjoyed it. My friends seem very much pleased with my playing; they can hardly believe I learned without a teacher." —* *E. G., Atlanta, Ga.*

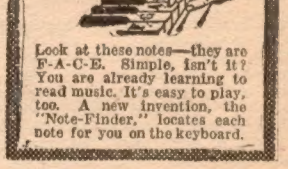
Music is the magic key to friendship, fun, romance. The person who can play a musical instrument is always sure of a welcome. Why not let music open the door for you to a happier, richer life? Mail the coupon and find out how easily and inexpensively you can learn at home.

* *Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional Models.*

Easy as A-B-C

No hum-drum scales or exercises, either. You start playing real tunes—from the *very first lesson.* YOU LEARN TO PLAY BY PLAYING. Every move is clearly shown in charts and illustrations—with accompanying text to lead you easily from one step to another. And what a thrill to hear yourself actually playing popular songs and classical selections! What a surprise for your friends!

Find out about this easy, money-saving method at once. If you want to learn music but are hesitating because you may be drafted, we have made special provisions for those who are called. Mail coupon below for illustrated free booklet giving complete information on how you can learn to play any instrument in your own home. Free print and picture sample included. **U. S. School of Music, 29411 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.** (Forty-Sixth Year. Established 1898.)



Look at these notes—they are F-A-C-E. Simple, isn't it? You are already learning to read music. It's easy to play, too. A new invention, the "Note-Finder," locates each note for you on the keyboard.

Send for Print and Picture Sample

U. S. School of Music, 29411 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home," and Free Print and Picture Sample.

Piano	Trumpet, Cornet	Flute
Guitar	Reed Organ	Piccolo
Hawaiian Guitar	Tenor Banjo	Modern Elementary Harmony
Violin	Ukulele	
Piano Accordion	Clarinet	Practical Finger Control
Saxephone	Trombone	

Have You Instrument?.....

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... *State*.....

NOTE: If you are under 16 years of age, parent must sign this coupon.

SAVE 2c—STICK COUPON ON PENNY POSTCARD

An Exciting Complete Action Novelet

Bullets ripped through the passage as Zeke leaped sideward

GUN MARSHAL OF WOLF CITY

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

Zeke Peasly brings his own Texas brand of law to the toughest gold camp in the snow-bound North—and fights a lone battle against grim desperadoes bent on his destruction!

CHAPTER I

Silver Potsy

LUSTY as a brass band, lawless as a den of rattlesnakes and just as full of sudden death, Wolf City boasted a man for breakfast every morning, and sometimes two. Set deep in the bleak, white wastes of the snow-bound Arctic, it was reputedly the toughest gold camp in Alaska.

Only a few of the hardcase gunnies inside the Faro Bank Saloon so much as turned their heads when a tall, loose-jointed stranger wearing a bright red mackinaw over an orange- and purple-checked shirt stormed in and elbowed his way to the carved mahogany bar. The stranger kept glancing back at the door.

"Gimme a drink, quick!" he rasped. "Before the fight starts."

A portly, red-faced, hard-eyed barkeep

shoved a glass and bottle forward. The stranger downed his drink.

"I'll need another—before the fight," he said, pouring himself a second shot.

Puzzled, the bartender followed the tall man's gaze toward the door.

"What fight yuh talkin' about, mister?" he asked quietly.

The stranger smiled, emptied his glass and set it aside.

"The one that's comin, Bub. I'm busted."

"Why yuh dirty, cheatin' scum!" screeched the bartender, snatching up his bottle of red-eye. "Jake—Gus!" he called. "Throw this saddle-bum out!"

Two burly, gun-hung hardcases moved through the throng. One of them spat pleasurably on his hands and rubbed them together as he approached the stranger.

"This the hombre?" he queried.

The bartender nodded. A third man, heavily built, frock-coated and with the sharp, beady eyes of a ferret moved to the still smiling stranger. He winked at Gus and Ike.

"I'll pay for the drinks," he announced. Then he turned to the tall man. "Feller, I admire your nerve. What seems to be the trouble?"

"Nothin' serious, pardner. Just broke and thirsty."

"No luck minin'?"

"Reckon that fits it. I'm pullin' out."

"Want a job?"

The stranger grinned. "Can a duck swim?"

The frock-coated man smiled. "I'm Kim Hosey. Mayor of Wolf City. We need a marshal mighty bad. Interested?" Reaching in his pocket Hosey held out a gleaming badge.

"What happened to the last law-dog in this burg?" asked the stranger.

"Boot Hill."

"And the one before him?"

"Same place. Same reason. Lead poisoning."

The stranger gulped. "Gimme another drink," he said to the bartender. Then he turned to the mayor. "Sounds like nice work if yuh can hang onto it." Taking the badge he pinned it on his shirt. "Yuh know somethin', Mr. Nosy? I look good in a silver potsy." He shined the badge with the sleeve of his mackinaw.

"The name's Hosey," snapped the mayor. "There's a council meeting this afternoon. I'll tell the Board of my action. You'll find your office and the jail across the street."

"Okay, Mr. Rosey."

"Hosey!" screamed the mayor, and walked away.

THE new marshal paid no attention to the titter that ran through the crowd and none of those present who had been enjoying the scene noticed the steely glint that crept into the stranger's pale blue eyes as he turned to the bartender.

"Gosh, that feller didn't even ask my name!" he declared. "It's Zeke Peasly. From Texas."

"'Here lies Zeke Peasly—from Texas.' That'll look good on a head-board, Zeke."

The crowd guffawed at the bartender's blunt humor. Zeke colored, but kept his lips buttoned. Better guessers than the gun toughs and riff-raff in the Faro Bank Saloon had made the serious mistake of thinking there was something funny about the soft-spoken Texan's drawling speech, his awkward, gangling build and the brightly colored raiment of which he was so fond.

But if Zeke sensed his elevation to town marshal had been pretty much in the nature of a joke, he didn't let on. Kim Hosey struck him as a man who planned his moves with a definite purpose behind them.

Zeke had almost reached the door when the bartender's voice rang out.

"Jake—Gus! That jasper didn't pay for his last drink."

"Charge it against my first month's pay," Zeke said easily, but he tightened imperceptibly as he saw Gus and Ike move into position flanking the door.

The crowd moved aside, anxious to be out of range, yet eager to witness the fun. Hoorawing town marshals was an old game in Wolf City. Zeke kept his eyes on Gus, the bigger of the two gunnies, as the tough's huge bulk blocked the door in a half-crouch, his hamlike hands hovering close to the gun butts of his twin Colts. Ike stood off to one side, ready to back his sidekick's play and watching the new law officer through half-veiled eyes.

Zeke stepped forward until he was close to Gus. Though his hand never strayed far from the holster thonged to his thigh underneath his mackinaw, it did not drop to the weapon there. There was no sign of fear on the Texan's face. Only a quiet, disarming, dangerous grin.

"The man says 'pay up'," snarled Gus, fingering his guns.

"I heard him. Stingy, ain't he?"

"What yuh goin' to do about it?"

"Just this!"

With a lightning-swift movement Zeke moved in close to Gus, close enough to swing a slashing right fist hard into the gunny's heavy, slab-muscled middle.

His left followed in an uppercut that lifted Gus, head up with a snap and toppled the man on his back.

Gus went down, clawing for his Colts. Zeke kicked one gun out of the fallen man's hand and tramped on the fingers of his other hand as it reached for the second shooter. Then Zeke swung toward Ike.

Ike, his gun half-clear of leather, was com-

Zeke marched the gunmen, whom Wolf City feared and considered invincible, down the street to the jail

pleting his draw. That was as far as he got. His outthrust jaw was a clean target for Zeke's hammering fist. The first blow that smacked against it with bone-crushing force sent him spinning backward. Ike caromed hard against a projecting post in the wall and slid to the floor, a vacant stare glazing his eyes as his head fell loosely forward on his chest.

Swinging back Zeke stamped his boot a second time on the fingers Gus was clamping around a gun butt. The big man howled with rage and pain.

"Anybody else got somethin' in mind?" snapped Wolf City's new marshal, glaring at the startled crowd.

Evil faces stared back at him in sullen silence. But here and there throughout the throng Zeke thought he caught the hint of a smile, and the faint but unmistakable light of a new-born hope in the grim visages of honest miners and prospectors.

"I wouldn't go for that scattergun, if I was you," Zeke admonished the bartender, who was groping beneath the counter.

Then as the scowling bartender straightened hurriedly and exposed empty hands Zeke turned his back on the crowd, opened the door and stepped outside.

The moment he was gone a buzz of conversation stirred inside the saloon. Several men rushed to help Gus to his feet. The bartender brought Ike to with a bucket of cold water.

"Looks like Kim picked a hellion this time," ventured a rat-faced individual, handing Gus his guns.

"I'll get that fool chechaco for this," Gus snarled, wiping blood from his chin.

The mayor pushed forward. "Maybe you will, some day," he said to the gun bully softly. "But not until I give the word. I've got a hunch we can use that hombre—for a while."

"He's my meat when yuh're through with him, Kim. If he lasts that long."

The mayor smiled thinly. "It's a promise, Gus. . . ."

OUTSIDE, the golden yellow northland sun glinted off the hard-packed snow in the street and shone with blinding, brittle brightness on the tall drifts, piled higher than a man's head at the edge of the sidewalks. At close intervals passages had been cut through the drifts to enable pedestrians to cross the street.

Peering through one of these slots Zeke saw across the way a sign above a frosted window that announced:

EAT HERE
It Ain't Home Cooking But It'll Do
Meals $2.50 a Throw
Jim Black, Prop.

Dodging the traffic of two swiftly passing dog teams Zeke crossed the street and headed for the restaurant. A tall and incredibly thin man looked up from behind the counter. Deep sorrow and the sadness of a wicked world seemed etched on his pale face. A hand-rolled quirly, wrapped in brown paper, hung from his sagging lower lip.

"I'm the new marshal," Zeke introduced himself briskly.

"That's too bad, young feller," intoned the thin man. "But there's nothin' I can do about it."

"How about a meal—on the cuff?" suggested Zeke. "I could shore use a mess of vittles."

The owner of the restaurant sighed.

"Set," he said, wiping a place on the counter in front of one of the stools with a dirty dish towel. "I reckon feedin' marshals in this town is the cross I got to bear. Some of 'em pays. Most of 'em don't live long enough."

"Mebbe I'm lucky. Yuh never can tell."

Zeke wrapped his long legs around the stool and studied the greasy menu. He was surprised to see so many different dishes offered in a mining town restaurant. Four or five kinds of meat were listed among the entrées and there was a big assortment of pies and pastries for dessert. His interest quickened. He ordered a broiled steak of Texas baby beef, French fries, creamed corn, and topped off with a request for coconut custard pie.

The owner nodded glumly and shuffled back to the kitchen. Zeke's mouth watered in anticipation of the meal. But when the food was put before him disappointment and annoyance swept across his face.

"Hey," he said, "I ordered beef. This is reindeer meat and it's so tough yuh can cut the gravy with a knife and fork. Where's them fried spuds? This apple pie don't look like no coconut custard neither. It's so old it's got whiskers on the apples."

The thin man smiled wanly. "I know," he said. "It is kind of a jolt the first time. That's all we got."

Zeke picked up the menu. "It says here—"

"Shore, but it don't mean anythin'. Figgered if the customers had to eat the same grub every day no sense havin' to read about it, too. So I worked out that men-oo. Sounds real good, don't it? Just like the States." He sighed. "A feller can dream, can't he?"

CHAPTER II

Gun Trap

ZEKE was hungry. Though the boiled potatoes were soggy and tasteless, and there was no creamed corn, he ate everything, including the pie. He washed down the meal with two cups of muddy coffee.

As the restaurant owner leaned forward to pick up the empty dishes, he blinked and drew back with a new and genuine twinkle in his sad brown eyes.

"Cowboy," he said, "yuh wear shirts like that all the time, or just on special occasions?"

Zeke grinned. "Yuh ought to see my rodeo outfits. Real silk."

The restaurant owner thrust his hand out. "I'm Jim Black from down Las Vegas way in Nevada." He tapped his ribs. "Stove in four ribs bronc ridin' in Pendleton, Oregon. What wuz yore specialty?"

"Bronc ridin'."

The two men laughed and shook hands and Zeke told something about himself.

"Say," declared Black, "did yuh know Foghorn Clancy back in the States?"

"Shore," replied Zeke. "That galliwappin' old walrus staged a heap of shows I rid in. He's all Westerner, and plenty of man."

"He shore is," agreed Black.

For a few moments, there in the frozen fastness of the far North, the two ex-cowboys swapped yarns and reminiscences of their riding days in the West. Then Zeke grew serious.

"What's the set-up here in Wolf City?" he asked.

"Yuh've got a tough job, son," answered Black. "We don't have no kind of law exceptin' twice a year when the circuit judge and a Federal marshal comes in and holds court. They're due soon. Long about time they're due the gang that runs this hole of perdition picks out a dummy marshal. It keeps things their own way, and makes it look good on the surface durin' court days."

"Suppose the marshal don't play it their way?"

Black laughed bitterly. "Yuh mean that, or just askin'?"

Zeke shrugged. "Suit yoreself."

Black looked around the place as if to reassure himself that Zeke and he were the only ones present. Then he lowered his voice.

"The he-wolf of these diggin's has three ways of makin' his badge-toters see the light. He musses 'em up, rough. He buys 'em with money. If that don't work he has 'em sprayed with a dose of lead. So far ain't none survived all three treatments."

"Kim Hosey top dog?"

"The mayor?" Black shook his head. "Kim handles the gun-slingers. And fronts for law and order. The real cobra is a pizen-eyed little weasel name of Blip Dorken. Blip don't show much except in the background."

"What do they get out of a town like this?" asked Zeke.

"Plenty," snapped Black. "Sky-high taxes. Crooked gamblin'. Clip joints. Robbin' prospectors fool enough to hit town with a fat poke and go to drinkin'. Hi-jackin' gold shipments. Murder when it suits 'em.

"Wolf City's bonanza rich, son. It's got miners makin' more money than they ever saw, faster than they ever made it before. Out on the criks a prospector washin' fifty dollars a day is just gettin' by. Peanuts. They don't whoop 'less the gold'll run that much to the pan. It all counts up for Dorken and his gang."

Zeke nodded. He got the picture. The prospectors worked for the gold, and the ring that held Wolf City in its smoke-iron grip snatched it away from them. For a moment Zeke was silent.

Jim Black guessed the Texan's thoughts. "Shore, the miners and decent citizens'd like to see a clean town here. They want to be safe, and be able to be proud of the place they built and live in. But if yuh're thinkin' what I think yuh are, don't try it. Yuh're up against a stacked deck."

Zeke was gazing out the window. Suddenly he got up.

"I'll be back," he said. "Got to see a man about a team of dogs."

Outside, a pint-sized individual in an expensive, ermine-trimmed parka, swung a heavy whip at his team of straining huskies. The frantic beasts were trying to start a sled frozen in the snow. A few yanks on the handle-bars would have freed the stuck runners, but the dogs couldn't do it alone.

Dodging under the whip, Zeke shoved the driver aside and jerked the sled loose.

"When yuh handle dogs," he snapped, "the first thing yuh got to be is smarter than they are."

As always his blood boiled at the sight of a human being mercilessly mistreating dumb animals.

The driver glared up at Zeke and his evil face was a ruthless mask of venom.

"Who the devil are you to tell me what to do with my dogs?" he rasped.

Zeke pointed to his new badge. "Law officer, pard."

"Bah!" The driver gave the dogs another lash, drawing a yelp of pain and an ugly streak of blood from the leader's flanks.

IMPULSIVELY Zeke grabbed the man, lifted him off his feet and carried him kicking and cursing to the nearest snow bank. Tipping him upside down he thrust him head first into the drift. Only the man's legs, waving wildly protruded from the snow.

"Son," said Jim Black dolefully when Zeke returned to the restaurant, "yuh shore start in at the top and work down. That was Blip Dorken yuh dumped in the drift."

"What do yuh know?" Zeke grinned, a low whistle escaping from his lips.

Black was solemn. "I kept out of things so far. But yuh're goin' to need help. When yuh do, holler." He sighed. "No fool like an old fool, I reckon."

"How are yuh with a gun?"

"Rheumatism's slowed my fingers some," answered Black. "But I reckon I can line and pull trigger."

Zeke laughed. "Thanks, Nevada," he said, moving to the door. "I'll remember that. Now if yuh'll just point out the way to the marshal's office—"

Zeke found his unlocked official headquarters to be a big room in a long, low, solidly

constructed log building, the main part of which was given over to a row of iron-doored cells. The cells were all empty. In a desk drawer he located a ring of keys to the building. Pocketing the keys, Zeke sought wood and kindling to start a fire in the pot-bellied stove that stood, cold and cheerless, in the middle of the floor.

He discovered some "wanted" posters thrown into the wood-box. Thumbing through a few his interest quickened as his eyes caught the legend:

WANTED!
GUS TILEY—IKE CLINT

The unmistakable likenesses of the two plug-uglies with whom he had tangled in the Faro Bank Saloon stared back at him from the crumpled sheet. Both men were wanted for bank robbery and murder in the States.

As Zeke studied the sheet a shot sounded outside. Jamming the poster into his mackinaw pocket, Zeke straightened, checked his gun and moved toward the door. Before he reached it a breathless, excited man rushed in.

"Another miner's been killed!" he panted. "In the alley 'longside the Faro Bank. Yuh better come, Marshal!"

As the man followed Zeke outside the thought came to the lawman that he had seen the fellow before—at the Faro Bank bar. Nevertheless, he stepped briskly down the street toward Wolf City's most notorious saloon. An alley separated the Faro Bank from an adjoining building. Halfway up the narrow passage Zeke found the crumpled form of a whiskered miner, blood crimsoning the snow on which it lay.

The dead man had been shot in the back. Zeke bent down to examine the body. At the sound of boots crunching on the snow he looked up quickly. Gus Tiley and Ike had suddenly appeared around the corner of the Faro Bank at the far end of the alley.

"Yuh murderin' law-dog!" snarled Gus, his big hands close to his guns. He winked broadly at Ike. "Clint, yuh seen him shoot that feller! Now he's robbin' him of his poke."

Zeke rose to a half-crouch. His hand dropped, but froze halfway to his holster.

"Keep away from that smokepole, mister," rasped a voice behind him. "I got a gun trained on yore spine."

Zeke recognized the voice. It belonged to the man who had decoyed him to the death-trap in the alley. Behind him he heard the click of a gun hammer being drawn back. Ahead Gus and Ike, their .45s out, separated slightly.

"This is goin' to be like shootin' fish in a barrel," laughed Gus. "Stand clear, Joe."

Despite the biting Arctic wind that swept through the alley, sweat beads stood out on Zeke's forehead. With a gun at his back and two killers in front of him, he seemed doomed. But he determined to go down fighting. Nerves taut, he waited tensely for the first bullet.

A gun blasted. Miraculously Zeke realized he was not hit. He heard the man behind him give a wild scream, and then perdition tore loose in the narrow alley. Bullets ripped through the passage as Zeke leaped sideward. The move brought his back against the wall of the building across from the Faro Bank. As he jumped his hand dipped down and up. And it came up pumping lead.

A quick glance told Zeke the man called Joe was out of the fight, for he sat on the ground cursing and clutching at a wounded shoulder. Surprised by the accident to their partner, Clint's and Tiley's first shots went wild as the pair sought cover from the barrage of lead Zeke threw at them. Clint stumbled, a bullet chopping his leg out from under him. Picking himself up he disappeared to safety behind the Faro Bank Saloon.

EYES wide with fright, Gus Tiley found himself alone, trading slugs with his adversary and his gun-thug's nerve collapsed. Turning his back on Zeke he ran to the end of the alley and followed his partner around the corner.

A cold smile spread across Zeke's face.

"The yellow coyotes!" he muttered. "Wouldn't stay and fight."

Leaning against the building, he slipped fresh shells in his gun and wondered where the shot had come from that had knocked Joe out of the party. That shot had probably saved his life.

His keen eyes caught the glint of a revolver barrel that flashed silver in the sun. He looked up as a window in the second floor of the building slammed shut. Zeke had a brief glimpse of a laughing blonde in a low-cut dress of turquoise blue. The girl stared down at him a moment. And then she disappeared.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," mumbled Zeke. "That gal had a gun in her hand. I'd swear she did."

Jim Black elbowed his way through the knot of people gathered at the alley entrance.

"Yuh hurt, son?" he asked, moving up to Zeke. "I heard the shootin'."

"Not a scratch, Nevada," Zeke assured, with a grin. He pointed to the wounded gunman. "Drag that carrion over to the jail and lock him up. Better get a doctor for him. Then wait for me. I'll be over pronto and make out the charges."

Ordering an onlooker to have the undertaker remove the body of the drygulched miner, he reached in his pocket and tossed the jailhouse keys to Jim Black. The restaurant owner caught the keys, but he looked worried. "Yuh ain't plannin' nothin' downright desperate, Zeke?"

"Not right now," replied the Texan. "I'm goin' callin' on a blonde."

The building across the alley from the Faro Bank Saloon was known as the Gilded Cage. It was run according to the sign over the double doorway by one Bess Lansdowne. Inside, opposite the long bar Zeke found a wooden stairway leading to a railed gallery that formed a well around the open dance floor below.

Rooms opened onto the gallery. Zeke spotted one on the alley side marked "Private" and started up the stairs, ignoring the bartender's shout that customers were not allowed above the ground floor.

At Zeke's knock a buxom colored maid answered the door, took one look at the badge on his shirt front, and rolled her eyes.

"Sakes alive, Mis' Bess!" she shrilled. "It's de law. Does Ah let him in, or does Ah don't?"

"Let him in, Anna Lou."

Bess Lansdowne's voice was warm and throaty. A voice, thought Zeke, that could be soft and seductive, or hard as a keg of nails, depending on its owner's mood.

He stepped into the room, part office, judging from the desk in the corner, but mostly furnished with ornate, expensive feminine frills.

CHAPTER III

Blonde in Blue

THE owner of the Gilded Cage reclined languidly on a deeply cushioned chaise longue. She wore a tight-fitting blue evening dress that revealed rather than concealed the lush curves of her well-rounded figure. It required a second glance to disclose that she was much older than she looked, her seeming youth being achieved by paint and powder.

"What's on your mind, Tall, Dark and Long-legged?" she asked, looking at him through heavily mascaraed eyelashes.

"That was nice shootin', ma'am," said Zeke. "Thanks."

Bess frowned. "Shooting? Come again, Handsome. I don't get it."

Zeke sniffed, and smiled. The acrid tang of powdersmoke hung in the air of the closed room.

"Have it yore way, lady," he said, and started to leave. "I just wondered why. That's all."

Bess called him back. "I don't think Joe's badly hurt. I only clipped his shoulder." She smiled. "You use the guns pretty good yourself—for a miner."

"Raised in Texas," Zeke said flatly.

Bess had the maid fix them a drink.

"None of my business, of course," declared Bess when the maid had gone. "But I was a little curious when Kelly—he's my bartender and he's got big ears—told me he heard Hosey downstairs planning to frame the new marshal. Hosey's plan was to make it look as if you'd been caught drygulching a miner so he could get you to do a job he wants done badly."

"What job?"

"I don't know." Bess sipped her drink. "Kelly didn't hear that part. Anyhow, when Hosey left, Gus Tiley and Ike Clint made it up between them to kill you, and tell Hosey the killing was an accident. Nice playmates you picked in Wolf City, lawman. Gus doesn't seem to like you."

"Reckon not."

Zeke explained about fist-whipping the big gunman in the Faro Bank Saloon. When he finished he shot a direct question at the woman on the chaise longue.

"Who killed the miner in the alley? Joe?"

Bess Lansdowne shrugged. "Joe Shock? I wouldn't put it past him. But I didn't see. I didn't go to the window until after the first shot was fired. Later when I saw the back and front deadfall you'd been lured into, I decided to take a hand. Woman's impulse, I guess." Bess smiled. "You weren't thinking of arresting me for gunning Joe?"

Zeke shook his head. "May need yuh for a witness—in court."

"Court!" Bess laughed. "In this gun-rodded camp! Pilgrim, are you joking?"

"I'm serious." Zeke stiffened.

Bess puzzled him. Her timely bullet had saved his life and yet he didn't know how closely she might be tied in with the mob that ruled Wolf City. He tried another question.

"Do yuh know Blip Dorken pretty well?" he asked, and was startled at the sudden change in the woman's manner.

"I know him better than most," she said bitterly. "We came to Wolf City together. That's over now. He's a snake, a slimy one, Mr.—"

"Peasly," offered Zeke.

"Thanks," said Bess. "I like to know who I'm talking to. Listen, Peasly, I run a clean place here. Good liquor, try to keep the gambling honest, floor show for entertainment, girls for dancing. And that's all, period. I'm no weak sister, but what Blip wanted me to do with the Gilded Cage would turn a mule's stomach, let alone mine. I hate that hombre for what he is, and what I suffered from him."

Her emotion spent, she pulled herself together and managed a smile.

"Forget it," she said. "Bess Lansdowne crying on a pilgrim's shoulder. It don't make sense. Have another drink before you go."

Zeke refused the offer. As he left Bess called after him: "If you think I saved

your hide to get even with Blip Dorken and his bunch you've got another guess coming—Good-looking."

Zeke's face colored like a ripe tomato.

"Quit blushing, you lusty young scamp," snapped the owner of the Gilded Cage. "It's not love. I'm old enough to be your mother."

Bess Lansdowne's throaty laughter followed Zeke down the stairs.

Outside, Zeke asked his way to the City Hall, and stopped in at the jail as he went by. Jim Black was still there.

"Doc Myers seen the prisoner," he volunteered. "He ain't hurt bad, worse luck. Want I should stick around longer?"

"A while," said Zeke. "Yuh might have callers. I'm goin' to the council meetin'. I'll be back right soon."

The room in which the city council met was on the second floor of the City Hall, a big, barnlike frame structure. The meeting was in progress when Zeke arrived. The door was ajar and he heard voices inside. At the mention of his name he stopped short and paused to listen before entering. The mayor was speaking.

"I tell you Peasly's just a tramp miner, Blip."

"He don't shoot like one." Zeke guessed the voice was "Blip" Dorken's.

"We checked on him," went on the mayor. "Peasly come to town a few days ago, bought him a prospector's outfit at Murphy's store and headed for the creeks. Then he came back, broke and disgusted. I figured we—"

"Talkin' about me?"

ZEKE pushed into the door and glanced around. The mayor, Dorken, Gus Tiley, Ike Clint and some others he didn't know were seated around a long table. The extras, Zeke judged, were councilmen, some of Dorken's underlings. They looked like fat politicians.

Dorken recovered his composure first. His eyes bored through Zeke.

"Why, yes, we were," he said. "Drygulching miners in broad daylight is bad business, Marshal."

Zeke snorted. "Framin' murders ain't good, either."

Dorken coughed and glanced quickly at Gus and Ike and Kim Hosey, the mayor.

"Cut out the palaver, Blip," blurted Ike Clint, pushing back from the table and exposing the bulge of bandages beneath his trousers leg where Zeke's bullet had speared him. "I tell yuh I seen this feller before somewheres. He ain't no jackass with a gun."

Hosey spoke up. "Might as well get down to cases, Dorken."

Dorken smiled. "Some of these men tell me you've handled a gun before, Peasly."

Zeke grinned at Gus and Ike. "They ought to know," he said quietly.

"Marshal," said Dorken, "I'll make you a proposition. We're all friends here. Since you didn't know who I was I'll forget being shoved in the snow."

"It wouldn't of made no never mind to me," said Zeke.

Dorken ignored the interruption. "We'll all forget what Gus and Ike saw in the alley, though the charges against you are serious. That is if you'll do us a favor. There's a party coming and we have strong reasons for not wanting him to reach Wolf City—alive."

"Yuh got a gun crew, Blip."

Dorken smiled. "This party happens to be a Federal marshal. They say he's fast with a shooter. The boys don't like to tackle a Federal law officer."

"Me either." Zeke grinned. "I'm funny that way."

Dorken watched Zeke closely, trying to measure the tall Texan who looked like a hick and fought like a gun-wise rod toter.

"Would fifty thousand dollars—"

Zeke laughed in Dorken's face. "Blip, I ain't about to tag that Fed with a bullet—for money or marbles."

The Texan took a quick step back toward the door, and whipped out his gun, covering the group at the table with it. His manner hardened. The men around the table tensed.

"Now I'll talk business," snapped Zeke. "Gus Tiley and Ike Clint, I'm arrestin' yuh for robbery and murder. Shuck yore hardware and step out, hands high."

Kim Hosey jumped to his feet. "You can't do that! It's their word against yours about what happened in the alley."

"I ain't thinkin' of the alley right now." Zeke smiled coldly. "Tiley and Clint are wanted—in the States. I got the dodger in my pocket."

A dark cloud crossed the mayor's face. He started to say something, but Dorken made him sit down. Then the bland-faced ruler of Wolf City winked slyly at Gus and Ike. The pair rose sullenly, dropping their gun-belts as they moved away from the table. No one said a word while Zeke gun-prodded his prisoners out the door and urged them through the empty hall and down the stairs. Ike Clint limped a little as he walked.

Zeke marched Kim Hosey's two top-hand gunmen down the center of the street toward the jail. It afforded the citizens along both sidewalks a chance to view the spectacle through the gaps in the snowdrifts that lined the thoroughfare. And it needled the pride and prestige of his glowering prisoners, men whom Wolf City had feared and considered invincible.

The parade had an additional effect, one which Zeke had not foreseen. It apprised every thug and gunman in town of the fact that their chief killers were being led to jail. Wolf City's lawless element was too well-

organized to take a thing like that lying down.

A few of the gun hands rushed to the City Hall for an explanation, and orders. Others began drifting into the more notorious saloons and liquoring up. They sensed a fight coming and wanted to be primed.

By the time Zeke reached the jail his prisoners' anger had given way to a chill, frozen expression. Deadly hatred iced their hard, relentless eyes.

Jim Black met the trio inside the door. A startled look swept his saturnine countenance.

"Feller," he said to Zeke, "yuh're crowdin' me. I got to get back to my restaurant."

Zeke smiled. "Okay, Nevada. Fetch me the keys and I'll put these polecats away till mornin'."

UNAWARE of how close Gus Tiley was to him, Jim Black leaned his stiff, rheumatic frame over the desk, his long arm reaching for the keys in the desk drawer. The motion threw his lean hips up and left the butt of his holstered .45 sticking out in the clear. With a speed remarkable for a man of his size and weight Tiley dipped his hand, snatched the weapon free and, clutching Black in front of him for a shield, swung on Zeke. At the same instant Clint, his hands still elevated, moved out of the line of fire.

"Go ahead—shoot!" taunted Gus, holding the squirming, struggling old man across his chest in a viselike grip. "If yuh don't hit this danged pard of yores, I'll drill him myself. Shoot, blast yuh, or drop yore gun!"

Zeke realized that unwittingly Black had allowed them to be trapped. He saw dismay and chagrin draw long lines down the hollows of the old ex-bronc rider's cheeks.

"Never mind me!" snapped Black. "Swap lead with the sidewinder!"

"Shut up!" snarled Gus. "Or I'll let yuh have it in the back." He glared at Zeke, and pulled back the hammer on his gun. "Make yore play, law-dog."

Slowly Zeke lowered his gun. He had no other choice. He might have downed Gus in a shoot-out, but Jim Black's life would have been the price he had to forfeit for the chance. In the Texan's book his own salvation was not worth the risk of killing a friend.

Tiley snapped an order at Ike Clint and when Ike had relieved Zeke of his .45 the big gunman moved over to the marshal. With a sudden vicious side swing he crashed his revolver barrel against the Texan's head. The marshal staggered under the blow. Gus smashed at him as he weaved, the second crack of gun metal against bone folding Zeke to the floor, unconscious.

"Yuh dirty sidewinder!" bawled Black.

Gus flung the old man back into the prod of the gun in Ike Clint's hand.

"This'll teach yuh not to meddle in Wolf City's affairs," he rasped.

He drew back his knotted fist and crashed it into Jim Black's open mouth. Black went down like a pole-axed ox. Tiley booted him in the face when he started to rise. The old man's head cracked against the floor and he lay still, blood trickling down the gray stubble on his chin.

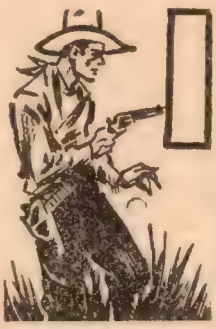
Gus Tiley grinned at his handiwork. Then he picked the keys from the desk and tossed them to his partner.

"Ain't yuh goin' to finish 'em now?" asked Clint.

"Naw," snapped Gus. "I'm goin' to see Kim Hosey and Dorken first. Let them settle it. But I got a hunch it's goin' to be bullets for two. Lock 'em up, Ike. They'll keep."

CHAPTER IV

Gun Party



IT WAS dark when Zeke Peasly came to. He was cold, and it needed no investigation to tell him he was in one of the dank, clammy jail cells. A square of faint moonlight angled through the frost-covered glass on the barred window at the rear of his cubicle. He heard groans from the adjacent cell.

"That you, Nevada?" he called. "How yuh makin' it?"

"Not good, son. Face feels like a hoss tromped it."

"Hold it, Jim!" snapped Zeke, suddenly alert. "I hear somethin'."

"Rats likely."

"Two-legged one, mebbe." Zeke listened again. "Sounds like somebody scratchin' on the winder." He moved cautiously to the rear of the cell. "Who's there" he said softly.

"Peasly?" Then a pause. "It's me—Bess Lansdowne. I haven't much time but I brought you a gun."

Zeke ran his hands hurriedly over the window, found it consisted of a single pane in a nailed-down frame.

"These windows don't open," he said. "How yuh goin' to get it in?"

"Smash the glass," replied the woman in her rich, husky voice. "Listen, Rooster. You're in a tight. Tiley and Clint and the rest of Dorken's bunch have got the town worked up for a jailbreak and hanging party. Looks like Dorken's idea. They convinced the miners you killed Jack Glancy."

"Who the devil is Glancy?" asked Zeke impatiently.

"The miner who was murdered in the alley. Now let me finish."

Zeke's heart pounded. The gun would give him a chance, yet he realized the risk Bess

was taking in bringing it to him. Fears for the woman clashed with hopes for his own future.

"Heave the gun in, and duck before somebody comes," he said.

"I'm watching," answered Bess. "Now get this. To clinch your guilt as far as the miners are concerned Dorken's bunch are sending a man over to give you a fake chance to escape."

"What about Black?" asked Zeke.

"That's his problem. He wasn't mentioned. They'll probably leave him there and let him out in the morning. Lots of folks in town like the old mountain goat." Bess paused, then snapped: "Look out! Here it comes!"

Broken glass cascaded into the cell with a tingling crash. A heavy object wrapped in a faintly perfumed woman's scarf dropped beside Zeke's feet. Zeke pulled himself up to where he could look out through the shattered glass. He wanted to thank Bess face to face, but the woman had already gone. All he caught was a fleeting glimpse of her fur-coated figure disappearing in the distance.

Dropping back into the cell Zeke examined the bundle. It contained a loaded, long-barreled Colt .45. Thoughtfully Bess had added some extra shells. Zeke put the spares in his pocket.

"Things are pickin' up," he called to Black. "I got me a shooter."

He relayed what Bess had told him about the bunch's plans.

"Funny," commented Black. "Bess Lansdowne don't usually cross up Blip Dorken. What are you to her, anyhow?"

"Danged if I know, Nevada. That's twice she's sided me in a pinch."

Zeke frowned in the darkness. The old perplexity regarding Bess' motives returned with double force to plague his brain.

"Anyhow," he said, "it's a good gun."

Black changed the subject. "I slipped up, reachin' for them keys. Yuh reckon I'm gettin' too old for this stuff?"

Zeke laughed. "A man's only as old as he feels, Nevada."

"By grabs, yuh got somethin' there," snorted Black. "Son, one gun ain't goin' to be enough for the two of us."

Zeke reminded the old-timer that he could play it safe. As Bess had said it wasn't likely that Dorken would let his gang gun a generally well-known and well-thought-of citizen such as Black. The marshal's arguments merely roused the ex-bronc rider's ire and made him more adamant.

"Yuh talked about Bess Lansdowne," declared Zeke. "Who's sidin' me now—when he don't have to?"

"With men it's different," grunted Black. "When it comes to wipin' out a nest of human sidewinders, or fightin' to lick the meanness in the world, decent hombres'll stick to the last gun. And their size, shape, race, creed or color don't make no difference. Think of them boys at the Alamo, and the lads that fit with Custer."

"Right now I'm thinkin' of how to get yuh a gun, yuh garrulous old windbag," cut in Zeke.

He was still pondering the question when the outer door of the building opened. Footsteps moved across the marshal's office.

"Lie still and let me handle this," Zeke whispered to Black. "We got company."

The Texan's eyes, accustomed to the gloom, made out the dark bulk of a man's figure advancing stealthily toward the cells.

"Hey, Marshal!" rasped a brittle voice that found difficulty trying to be soft. "It's a friend."

A KEY grated in the cell lock and the visitor urged Zeke to flee. The manner of the would-be "friend" was so obviously phony that even without Bess' warning Zeke would have guessed a trick. He crouched in a back corner of the cell, groaning.

"I'm hurt," he moaned. "Gimme a hand, will yuh?"

As the man stepped inside, Zeke sprang. One hand clamped over the fellow's mouth, the other brought a gun crashing down on his head. With a muffled cry the man slumped to the floor.

"Had to be, hombre," said Zeke, frisking him of the keys and taking the gun and cartridge-belt from the unconscious man's waist.

On his way out Zeke locked the cell behind him. Releasing Jim Black he handed the old-timer the salvaged gun and belt.

"Buckle her on and yuh'll feel better."

Already the sound of the gathering mob outside was seeping into the jail building like the ominous rumble of distant thunder heralding a coming storm. As Zeke and Jim Black paused a moment in the corridor, working the stiffness out of sore bones, the noise, the shouts and catcalls grew louder.

"What comes next, son?" queried Black.

Zeke smiled coldly. "I'm goin' out and try to talk some sense into them hot-headed fools," he said. "Must be some of 'em got a little brains."

"Yuh—yuh're goin' to face that kill-hungry mob?"

Zeke nodded. "Oh-oh!" sighed Black. "Here we go again."

With Black backing him, Zeke moved toward the door, but it was burst open before he reached it and a crowd of grim, angry men waving guns that glistened in the moonlight funneled into the semi-darkness of the room. Urging his companion to keep quiet, the marshal retreated to a corner behind the desk and crouched there for a moment in the deep shadows, every muscle tense as a coiled spring.

"Light the lamp, somebody. I'll smoke the polecat out."

Zeke recognized Gus Tiley's booming voice. The gunman was in the forefront of the throng. A moment later his heavy boots were pounding down the corridor toward the cells. A chair scraped along the floor as a volunteer stood on it to reach the hanging lamp suspended by brass chains from the ceiling. Then, too quickly to have made a genuine search, Gus stormed back.

"He's gone, fellers!" he shouted. "The killer's escaped! That shore does prove the skunk's guilt!"

"Hunt him down!" shrilled a voice from the crowd.

Some of those near the door turned. They had already started back to the street when the overhead lamp flickered, then flared up to send flat fingers of yellow light probing into the shadows of the room. Zeke glimpsed the faces of those who had come to kill him.

For the most part the men in the mob's lead looked like gun toughs. Behind them were some grim citizens, honest miners roused to fever pitch by the past murders in Wolf City and determined now to wreak violent justice on the first culprit who fell into their hands.

Zeke stood up in the corner and took a step forward, his gun hand at his side.

"Lookin' for me, hombres?" he said, and for an instant his sudden appearance and calm manner electrified the throng. He held up his free hand. "Yuh're lettin' Hosey's and Dorken's hired killers make fools out of every one of yuh!"

"Don't listen to him!" snarled Tiley. "He'll lie to yuh. Clint! Joe! Get him!"

Zeke brought his gun hand up.

"He's got a gun!" shrilled Gus.

Plainly that was not in the cards. Momentarily the forward-moving killers in the mob halted. Then some hothead by the door fired his shooter in the air. It acted as a signal. After that pandemonium reigned.

The silver wash of moonlight and the yellow flicker of the swaying ceiling lamp were blotted out by the lurid scarlet flashes of gunfire that crisscrossed the marshal's office. Men screamed. Forms thudded to the floor, cursing as hurtling lead ripped angry red splotches through the intermittent gloom. Shouts and blasphemed orders added to the uproar.

Zeke felt the strike of lead tearing through his shoulder. The impact slapped him back against the wall. He stumbled, but managed to right himself. He grinned at the deafening gun cracks that blasted close beside him in his ears. Jim Black, a hungry, happy look on his long face, was siding him to the last shell.

"Watch yore shots!" Zeke told him hurriedly. "Try for Dorken's killers and save them fool miners if yuh can."

"I'm pickin' 'em!" yelped the old-timer. "Clint's down—for good. So's Joe Shock and a couple of others."

ZEKE weaved his lithe body as he paused to reload and tried to shout above the din. His voice was drowned out in the bedlam of the screams and yells of men gone berserk. He turned to Black.

"Last round, pardner!"

"Mine, too." The old man grinned at him. "But, son, we're shore makin' a grand finish."

Even as he spoke a gun cracked and Black dropped to the floor, his hand grabbing convulsively at his side. Zeke saw him fall and, out of the corner of his eye, glimpsed Gus Tiley's gloating face.

"Yore turn next!" Gus roared, swiveling his gun on Zeke.

The big killer triggered, but his squeezing finger was a fraction of a second slow. Zeke's swift snap-shot drilled a neat round hole above Tiley's hate-filled eyes. Little spurts of blood bubbled from the gun bully's forehead as his heavy body crashed, and lay motionless on the floor.

Near the door some of the mob, surfeited by the carnage, began to move outside, urging others to do likewise. With their leaders, Clint and Tiley, gone, the paid gun hands suddenly lost interest in trading further lead for the

[*Turn page*]

deadly, lightning accuracy of Zeke Peasly's bullets. They started backing to the door. As the gunfire ceased a sodden, death-filled hush so thick you could cut it with a knife settled over the reeking, powder-smoke-filled room.

And it was through this hush that the falsely pious voice of Kim Hosey reverberated as the mayor, followed by Blip Dorken pushed through the crowd.

"Men, citizens of Wolf City," he was saying, "this is awful. You should have let the law take its course. Tomorrow Judge Kladek arrives from Juneau and then this wanton killer, Zeke Peasly, could have had a fair trial."

"He still can," called out Zeke, grinning. He looked at his gun. It was empty. He had no more shells, so he tossed the .45 on the desk. "Reckon a fair trial'd be a novelty in Wolf City, huh, Mayor?"

For a moment Kim Hosey stared at Zeke, dumbfounded. Then his face turned livid with rage.

"Clint! Tiley!" he shouted, all pretense dropping from his hate-contorted face. "What happened? I told you to kill this man!"

"Yuh'll have to yell louder'n that, Kim."

Zeke pointed to the bodies of the dead gunmen on the floor.

Hosey took a single glance. Then his eyes glued on Zeke and he stabbed for his gun. His trigger finger began to tighten slowly.

"You blasted small-time meddler!" he rasped. "Say your prayers!"

CHAPTER V

Gold Potsy

BEHIND Hosey, Zeke saw that Jim Black had moved. The lantern-jawed old-timer had raised his gun and was pointing it unsteadily. Suddenly the gun in Black's hand roared, but his shot had gone wild, and he slumped back to the floor.

The blast brought Hosey half-around. Though it disconcerted him only momentarily and he swung back triggering at Zeke, it gave the Texan the chance he needed. He leaped at Hosey as the mayor's first shot flamed across his cheek. Blinded with pain, Zeke charged forward, knocking the gun from Hosey's hands and kicking it aside.

"I'm goin' to kill you," screamed Hosey, "if I have to use my bare hands!"

Infuriated, the big, slab-muscled gun boss swung both fists at Zeke's pain-torn head. Zeke tried to duck, slipped under one sledge-hammer blow but the second slashed into his bleeding cheek, staggering him. Hosey, as tall as Zeke and heavier built, followed up his initial advantage quickly, smashing through the Texan's guard. Zeke back-pedaled, then moved forward, lashing out with a right to Hosey's face, and a quick left that smacked against the flesh of the mayor's stomach.

Hosey grunted. Throwing himself at his opponent in a frenzy of rage he slashed wildly at Zeke's head and face. Zeke, panting, dodged and ducked but his feet were firmly planted and he gave no ground, trading blow for blow with the heavier man. Hosey seemed obsessed with a savage desire to kill or maim. His face twisted into a mask of cold fury as the room shook with the thud of blows.

Through a reddish haze, and with an increasing feeling of dizzy nausea in the pit of his stomach, Zeke kept throwing his iron-hard balled fists. His wounded shoulder that had ached at first was numb now, and when he swung his left arm it was like trying to swing a pot of lead. Still he managed to keep his feet, to stand up against Hosey's relentless, flailing fists and prevent his blows from smashing him to the ground.

The men in the room watched the fight in awed silence, aware they were witnessing a battle of champions in which there would be no quarter given, none asked.

A blow crashed against Zeke's head. He reeled, cold with the sudden fear that loss of blood and his wounds were weakening him too severely. Pain throbbed in every muscle of his body. He knew his strength was draining.

In the seeming far-off distance he heard a voice, Bess Lansdowne's voice.

"Drop him, Rugged! Knock him for a loop!"

He wondered what Bess was doing there, or if he was dreaming. Through a blurry mist Hosey's killer face loomed in front of him. He saw a powerful fist driving at him and tried to shift and duck aside. But he slipped and as the blow landed, crashed to the floor.

From some hidden reserve he drew the strength needed to reel back to his feet before Hosey flung his whole weight down on him. Bracing himself for the next onslaught, knowing another of Hosey's hard blows would mean the end, Zeke drew back his right fist for a wild, roundhouse haymaker. Miraculously it landed, catching Hosey flush on the point of his out-jutting jaw.

The hard clout stopped the gun boss dead in his tracks. Hosey dropped his guard, his arms went limp and a look of pained surprise locked his face as he teetered back and fell crashing to the floor.

Zeke weaved unsteadily. He wiped the blood from his face and out of his misty eyes. He could hear Bess Lansdowne talking and he looked up, focusing his eyes to get a better vision.

Her fur coat thrown open, a gun-belt hold-

ing a white leather holster that housed a pearl-handled .38 whipped around her waist, Bess stood on the desk underneath the lamp and harangued the miners in the room.

"You witless dumbbells!" Zeke heard her saying. "Letting a pair of crooks run Wolf City, letting their hired gunhands steam you up to wanting to hang an innocent man for a killing he didn't do!"

"How do yuh know he didn't?" interrupted a voice from the doorway.

"I'll tell you how, Mr. Smarty!" snapped the owner of the Gilded Cage. "I was looking out the window at the time. And I'll tell you who had Jack Glancy killed just like they had many another. Your precious mayor, Kim Hosey, and Blip—"

That was as far as she got when the gun blasted. Too late, Zeke had spotted Blip Dorken fidgeting in the front row, watching Bess through evil, slitted eyes. Zeke had barely caught the quick motion as Blip's hand darted inside his coat and came out holding a deadly little derringer. The hideout gun had barked before Zeke was able to make a move.

He looked at the desk, saw Bess clap a hand to her side, saw the anguish in her face as she wavered a moment. And then he rushed forward and caught her before she fell.

A HALF-DOZEN angry miners seized Dorken from behind and wrenched his gun away, as Zeke lowered the wounded woman to the floor.

Through pain-filled eyes Bess smiled up at Zeke.

"Hello, Good-looking." Her deep, full voice was just a whisper. "If this is it, Peasly, let them all forget some of the things I've done. But let them remember I went out on the right side—trying. I've got a boy in the States. He's for law and order, too. He's a Fed—a Secret Service man."

Bess paused. She compressed her red lips against the pain, then went on:

"You—remind me of my son, Peasly. Maybe that's why I sided with you—from the start." Her word came more haltingly. "His name's Rob—Rob Lansdowne. Tell him I wound up—on the same side—he's on—plugging for the law. Frontiers need law—like every place else. Tell him—will you, Peasly?"

Zeke nodded. Bess Lansdowne closed her eyes and didn't move. Zeke laid her gently on the floor. He bent over and kissed her on the forehead.

"That's for Rob," he said quietly.

Then he got up and strode over to Blip Dorken and his swinging fist smashed the man clear across the room. Dorken skittered in a shapeless heap and brought up against the still inert form of Kim Hosey.

"Yuh woman shooter!" Zeke growled furiously.

Loosing the rage that seethed within him, he swung on the abashed and shame-faced miners of Wolf City, lashing them verbally with his tongue.

"Things are going to be different around here!" he thundered.

A few remaining members of Dorken's gang started edging toward the door and when the miners sought to stop them, Zeke ordered them to let the gunnies go.

"They're only small fry. Give 'em twenty-four hours to get out of town."

A commotion in the doorway cut him short. Goateed, paunchy Doc Myers, black bag in hand, moved briskly through the group.

"Heard the shooting," he volunteered. "Thought I'd better come over."

Zeke pointed to Bess Lansdowne and Jim Black.

"Thanks, Doc. See if yuh can do anything."

Black sat up with a start. Then he rose to his full height and clawed for his gun.

"No yuh don't, Doc," he snorted. "Keep clear, yuh old sawbones. Nothin' ails me a mite of rest won't fix. Whyn't yuh let a feller sleep. I sure had me a busy day."

Some of the men smiled. The majority retained sober faces as Myers went over to Bess Lansdowne. He felt her pulse. Then he reached in his bag for his stethoscope, and shook his head.

Silently the men in the room removed their hats. They stood in an uneasy circle about the desk. Someone coughed. As Doc Myers glanced up a miner reached for his red bandanna handkerchief, dabbed it at his eyes. The doctor's shrewd, quick eyes surveyed the tense room. Then he stood up and faced the solemn group.

"Put your hats on!" he shrilled. "Ain't anything wrong with Bess Lansdowne but excitement and a superficial flesh scratch. Didn't any of you rannihans ever see a lady faint before. Get a glass of water, somebody. That's all she needs."

Bess didn't even need that, though six men dashed out to get water at the nearest saloon. Slowly Bess opened her eyes. Then she sat up.

"Where am I?" she said.

"But, Doc," insisted Zeke, helping Bess to her feet, "the blood on her dress—"

Doc Myers grinned. "Yeah, and look at your face. It's dripping gore. That's where it came from. You look like the one who needs attention, Marshal."

Zeke smiled, relieved that Black and Bess were still alive.

"Later, Doc," he said.

One of the miners stepped up to Zeke, and held out his hand.

"Reckon we been a pack of blind fools, mister," he declared. "We're goin' to hold another election soon, and the boys thought—well, how about Jim Black for Mayor and you for town law—permanent?"

"Nevada'd make a good mayor. But me—" Zeke shook his head.

"You won't stay?"

"I'm afraid I can't, friend."

Zeke took the silver badge and tossed it on the desk. He fumbled in his pocket a moment, then turned and went over and slapped Kim Hosey back to consciousness with his open palm. "Look, Nosy!" Zeke pointed to his chest. "I look good in a gold potsy, too."

KIM HOSEY'S face drained of color as he stared at the gleaming yellow badge on Zeke's shirt front.

"United States Marshall" he moaned.

"That's right Hosey." Zeke grinned. "Wait till Dorken learns I'm the hombre he wanted *me* to gun off."

Jim Black came over. He had been choosing guards and organizing clean-up squads from volunteers among the miners.

"Let's put Hosey and Dorken in the pokey," he said. "I got men'll see they stay there till that judge shows up in the mornin'. What about that feller yuh locked in when yuh snatched the keys?"

"Let him out, Nevada. He done us a good turn."

Suddenly the old man noticed the badge Zeke was wearing. His eyes twinkled.

"Son," he said, "I suspected that. Yuh hadn't ought to tried to fool an old bronc rider like yuh done. Yuh never did act like no jackass prospector to me. But I couldn't place yuh."

"I can," snapped Doc Myers. "Right in bed. If he doesn't let me dress those wounds he's going to collapse. And I won't be responsible for the results."

Zeke tried to smile at the doctor. But he felt tired and let down and he wanted to rest. He looked about for a chair. The doctor gripped him by the elbow and held him up.

"Take him over to the Gilded Cage," ordered Bess. "And if he's got nerve enough to say he knows a better place, I'll break his neck."

She put her hand firmly under Zeke's other elbow.

"Jim Black can take charge here. Come on, Tall, Game and Blood-smeared. Let's get going. You look a sight."

Next issue: SIX-GUNS AND A HUNCH, *an Exciting Action Novel by* W. C. TUTTLE—*and Many Other Smashing Yarns!*

•

Your face looks swell, feels better yet
When you shave with a Thin Gillette.
This blade saves time and dough what's more—
For one dime buys a pack of four!
TONITE!
PHOTOGRAPH YOUR OWN PIN-UP GIRL!
Made of easy-flexing steel hard enough to cut glass
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
4 for 10c
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

Johnny squeezed off a slow shot at Lem Fargo

TRIGGER SAVVY

By CHUCK MARTIN

Deputy Johnny Siler was fired for not throwing off his shots, but he had his own way of dealing with border wolves!

BAR KELLY had shot up a drunk and Deputy John Siler had a warrant for Kelly's arrest. Don Carter was sheriff of Acton County, Arizona, and his words to his young deputy had been plain.

"Get the drop on Kelly and bring him to jail, Johnny. And don't trigger that fast six-shooter of yores!"

Johnny Siler was medium tall and saddle-lean. He'd weigh mebbe one-fifty-five, had just passed his twenty-third birthday, and never had been propery tamed. He was a good peace officer, entirely fearless, but as Sheriff Carter had pointed out, too fast with his law-gun.

Bar Kelly was standing in front of the Eagle Saloon when Siler came down the boardwalk from the jail. Kelly was a big rock-hard hombre who whittled for his dead on the handles of his Frontier .44 Colt. He was ten years older than the deputy now advancing steadily toward him.

Johnny Siler always went through the law routine, or at least he always tried to. He'd tell his man he was under arrest, specify the charge, and order the suspect to surrender peaceful. He started to read Kelly off, but the tough killer changed the play.

"Yuh're under arrest, Kelly. Charged with—"

"Which I'm not surrenderin'," Bar Kelly interrupted, and dug for his holstered gun.

Johnny Siler dipped his hand with the speed

and grace of a magician. His nostrils flared widely, anticipating the smell of burning powder. The .45 Peacemaker Colt flashed up in his hand with pale flame lighting the muzzle until a gust of black powdersmoke snuffed out the spurting blaze.

Bar Kelly grunted and triggered a shot through the bottom of his holster. Then the big killer pitched from the high boardwalk and stirred up a dust cloud when his body puddled down in the street like a pole-axed steer.

Johnny Siler tipped his bucking gun up to cover a tall lean gambler standing in the doorway of the Eagle Saloon. Two hard-faced gunswifts flanked Bob Sturgiss, one on either side. All three had hands on the belt-guns, but they said they didn't want any when Johnny Siler asked them if they were taking up for the deceased.

Leaving out the law, Bob Sturgiss bossed everything else in Acton. He was tall, handsome, and thirty years old. He owned the feed store and livery barn, the Eagle Saloon, and the Palace gambling hall. He also owned several small ranchers who had lost money to him over the poker table. And Sturgiss didn't like Johnny Siler.

"I'll take yuh some day when yuh can't hide behind the law-star, Siler," Sturgiss told the young deputy. "Bar Kelly worked for me, and I won't forget."

"Take me now," Siler answered, his voice a low hum. "If I wasn't wearin' this star, I'd holster up and take on all three of you tinhorn killers!"

Bob Sturgiss shifted his eyes from Siler's face to stare at the ball-pointed star on the deputy's vest. Then Sturgiss turned his back and walked into the saloon. Crad Edwards and Lem Fargo followed their boss inside, and Johnny Siler made a derisive sound with his lips.

A PRETTY girl was watching him, with aversion written plainly on her face. Siler saw her and quickly removed his black Stetson. Her low throaty voice was bitter as she denounced him as a hired killer.

"That's three men you've killed in the last six months, Johnny Siler. You shouldn't be allowed to work for the law!"

All the fighting glare left the gray eyes of Johnny Siler as he lowered his head and dug at a splinter with the toe of his right boot. He holstered his gun, gulped a time or two, and stammered out his side of the fight.

"He drew on me first, Betty Jo. I have a warrant for his arrest, and yore father sent me up to bring him in. It was either him or me."

"It is always the other man," Betty Jo Carter said wearily. "Please don't come to see me any more!"

Johnny Siler watched her walk away with angry strides, and then he sighed. His father had been a Texas Ranger when the "Wanted" book contained the names of more than five thousand outlaws, and orders had been to bring them in—dead or alive.

Old Sam Siler had taught his chip never to pull his gun unless he meant to shoot, and not to throw off his shots. The first time Ranger Sam Siler had gone soft and held his fire, the outlaw he had arrested, jumped the gun. They buried Sam Siler down near the Rio Bravo, and the next day they buried his killer. Johnny Siler had seen to that. Wade Buckler had been his first man, but not the last.

Siler shrugged his wide shoulders and went on back to the jail. He stopped at the furniture store to tell Chris Flengle to pick up the dead man, and the stolid Dutchman said he would sell a good coffin to Bob Sturgiss. . . .

Sheriff Don Carter was reasonably big, and well-fleshed. Six feet tall and close to two hundred pounds. His gray-flecked black hair marked him as fifty-odd, and he had the stern carriage of legal authority.

Betty Jo Carter left by the back door as Johnny Siler dragged his drop-shanked spurs over the front sill. The sheriff looked up with ice in his dark eyes, an angry frown on his weathered face.

"I told yuh to bring Bar Kelly in alive," he said to his deputy. "But no, yuh had to kill him!"

"He started to drag his hardware first, Sher'ff," Siler explained quietly. "He said he wouldn't surrender, and he dug for his cutter."

"Did yuh ever shoot a man in the leg with a forty-five slug?" the sheriff asked bitingly.

"No, I never did."

"Yuh ever shoot one in the arm, or high in the shoulder?"

"No, suh, Sher'ff," the young Texan admitted honestly. "I don't ever remember throwin' off my shots."

"Now, look, Johnny," Carter began patiently. "A man will get himself knocked down wherever yuh hit him with a forty-five slug. Wound him if necessary, drag him to jail, and let him heal up his hurts. Then he can stand trial, and pay for his sins."

Johnny Siler appeared interested, and then he turned away with a sigh. For want of something better to do, he drew out his smoke-grimed gun and ejected the spent shell. Becoming embarrassed under the sheriff's direct stare, he sat down behind the desk and reached for a box of cleaning tools.

Don Carter waited until his deputy had cleaned the balanced gun thoroughly. As Siler seated the weapon in his molded holster, the sheriff spoke sternly.

"This ain't Texas, and we don't have a 'Wanted' book up here. Don't look like yuh aim to change none, and yuh can't obey orders. I'll have to ask yuh for yore star, Johnny Siler. As of now, you are no longer ridin' for the law!"

Siler's jaw dropped, and there was misery in his eyes as he raised his head slowly to stare at the sheriff.

"I've been yore deputy for goin' on two years, Don," he said in a stricken voice. "I'd side yuh like I did my old man, and I think a heap of—"

"Betty Jo doesn't want to see yuh any more, Johnny," Carter said stonily. "I'll pay yuh up to the first of the month, and I'm warnin' yuh to stay out of gun-trouble with citizens of Acton."

Johnny Siler made no mention of the threats Bob Sturgiss had made. He slowly unpinned the ball-pointed star from his vest, stared for a moment at the outline where the sun had faded the cloth around the badge, and laid it on the desk.

Sheriff Carter counted out seventy-five dollars in paper money, shoved it toward Siler, and started to read a poster. Johnny counted on the calendar, shoved twenty-five dollars back, and began taking his few belongings from the drawers of the spur-tracked old desk.

He dumped his things into his war-sack, tugged his hat down over his cold gray eyes, and started to leave.

"I'll be out at my homestead a few days if yuh need me, Sher'ff," he said in his soft drawling Texas twang. "A man never had a squarer boss. *Hasta la vista, amigo.*"

Don Carter sat at his desk a long time after Johnny saddled his horse and rode out of town.

"Till we meet again," he repeated Siler's farewell. "And he called me 'friend' after what I did to him. I hope he learns his lesson, but I can't have a killer rubbin' stirrups with me!"

JOHNNY SILER ran a few head of cattle and a string of good saddle horses on his homestead. His only help was a rheumatic old Texas cowhand by the name of Bill Lee. Lee had been a Ranger under Sam Siler, and had been badly wounded by Wade Buckler, the man who sent Sam to his grave.

Lee was small and wiry, a fierce-looking old *Tejano* with sweeping cowhorn mustache. Day or night, Bill Lee never was seen without his cedar-handled .45 Colt tied down on his right leg. His language was a foreign tongue to anyone born outside of Texas.

"De-horned yuh, eh?" he greeted Siler, as Johnny rode into the J S yard and swung down from his horse.

Johnny glanced at the old Texan, followed his gaze to the spot on his vest where his badge had been. He nodded glumly.

"Sher'ff allowed I was too fast with my hardware," he said bitterly. "Said a forty-five slug would knock a man down wherever it hit him, and I ought to learn not to line my sights dead center."

"Who'd yuh kill this time?"

"Bar Kelly. He dug for his pistol first."

"Kelly had a killin' comin'," Lee said with finality. "You can make more money on the spread by breakin' out our J S three-year-olds. Where we came from, they don't teach a lawman to throw off his shots!"

It was Bill Lee who came riding in the next morning with a half-breed Apache Indian. What with knowing a smatter of Border Spanish, and some of the Indian sign language, Bill Lee told Johnny that Bob Sturgiss had sent a six-shooter challenge.

"He wants yuh to ride into town and meet him in front of the Eagle Saloon," Lee interpreted. "I'll saddle a fresh horse and side yuh."

Johnny Siler shook his sandy head. His right hand stroked the grips of his gun, but his hands were steady as he built and fired a brown paper quirly. He spoke through the pungent smoke which curled up from his nose.

"Bob Sturgiss never did anythin' to me," he told Lee. "When he does, I'll hunt him down from here to who pried the chunk."

Bill Lee pushed back his battered Stetson and stared with incredulity in his pale blue eyes. Then his lips trapped together as he made talk to the redskin with his hands. After the Indian had ridden toward Acton, Lee asked his young boss a question.

"Are yuh goin' soft on account of that Carter filly?"

Johnny Siler colored up and twitched his shoulders angrily. He dropped his cigarette to the ground and put his left boot on the spark. Then he looked up and smiled coldly at Bill Lee.

"Bob Sturgiss will do somethin' to me," he said tonelessly. "Let's get into the tank and break out a colt. Rope the orn'riest jughead in the cavvy!"

Bill Lee nodded with a smile of understanding. He was still smiling when Johnny climbed a big fighting gray gelding and hung the hooks in the outlaw's shoulders. When the fight was over and the gray had admitted defeat, Siler swung down and stripped his riding gear with gentle hands.

"The gray didn't do yuh anythin'," Bill Lee remarked carelessly. "Like yore old man used to say when startin' a man-hunt, yuh'll do to take along."

Johnny Siler said he could do with a bait of hot grub and Billy Lee limped off to the kitchen. The two men were finishing their dinner when a big horse came roaring into the yard. Siler was at the front door when Sheriff Don Carter dismounted slowly and almost fell to the ground.

Johnny Siler ran out and braced the sheriff with a strong left arm. His searching glance stopped on a red splotch high on the sheriff's left breast, just above Carter's law-star. Bill Lee came to help, and they assisted the wounded officer into the front room and onto a skin-covered couch.

"Yuh've got to act for me, Johnny," the sheriff gasped. "I'm appointin' you as actin' sheriff until I heal up my hurts. Yuh can't refuse me now!"

"The heck I can't," Johnny drawled coldly.

"Now I'm tellin' yuh, Don Carter. Yuh had trouble with Bob Sturgiss. Yuh told him he was under arrest, and then yuh asked him to surrender."

"That's the law way," Carter answered stubbornly. "Sturgiss shook a hideout gun down his sleeve, and those two gun-dogs of his got me under their drop."

"Yeah," Bill Lee interrupted bluntly. "Where me and Johnny come from, they shoot first and ask questions afterwards. Pay him no mind, Johnny."

"Yuh heard what Bill said," Johnny Siler told the sheriff. "Me and him are breakin' out a bunch of colts in the first rough string. Yuh took my star away yesterday, and Bob Sturgiss sent word out here he was goin' to start shootin' on sight when I rode into town. If I see him, I aim to shoot first, and drill him center!"

YUH don't have to ride into Acton," Carter said, and his voice was faint from pain and loss of blood. "Bob Sturgiss took Betty Jo and headed for Sorrento across the Border. Word come to me while the doc was dressin' this triflin' wound, and I hit saddle and high-tailed it out here to ask yore help!"

"Nuh uh," old Bill Lee grunted coldly. "Betty Jo don't want no truck with a hired killer, and it will take a killer to get her away from Sturgiss and his pack of Border wolves. When it comes to outlaws who make war on women folks, me and Johnny is both killers. Let's help him back on his hoss, Johnny."

Johnny started to nod and then he saw the unshed tears in the sheriff's fever-bright eyes. He turned his face away, but Don Carter caught his right hand.

"Yuh've got to do it for Betty Jo, Johnny," the sheriff pleaded. "She's young and she didn't understand, but she does now."

"Pay that law-dog no mind, Johnny," Bill Lee said harshly. "Bob Sturgiss is just baitin' himself a man trap. He figgers yuh to come a-faunchin' into Sorrento which is in Mexico. After him and his gang smoke yuh down from cover, Sturgiss will send the gal back home!"

"Sturgiss wants to marry Betty Jo," Carter said in a faraway voice. "He won't—send—her home!"

Siler turned swiftly when the sheriff's hand fell to the couch. Don Carter had slipped into unconsciousness. He had made a plea for help, and his side of the argument was finished.

"I gotta go, Bill," Johnny said slowly, and his gray eyes were like glaring ice on a mountain lake. "I'm ridin' into Sorrento, and the sheriff won't need his gun for a while."

Bill Lee watched while Siler unbuckled the sheriff's shell-studded belt and strapped it around his own hips. The old man stepped up and changed the holster to fit the left leg, and his rasping voice held a faint sneer when he spoke.

"Now yuh're a two-gun killer, Johnny boy. Yuh can't shoot for shucks with yore left hand, but that extra cutter will do for a spare. The sher'ff can sleep here tonight, so let's get started for the Border!"

* * * * *

Sorrento squatted on a mesa in the Sierra Madre mountains three miles across the Mexican border. That made it fourteen miles from Acton, or a good hour's ride on a fast horse.

A late moon was scudding behind black thunder clouds when two Mexicans rode through Diablo Pass. Both wore *charro* outfits with tight-legged pants flaring wide at the bottom, bolero jackets with serapes across their left shoulders, and heavy high-crowned sombreros.

One of the riders was a tall wide-shouldered hombre with two guns strapped around his lean hips. The older man was small with one leg shorter than the other. Long cowhorn mustachios drooped at the sides of his tight-lipped mouth.

"We will stop at Manuel's *cantina,*" the older man said in fluent Border Spanish. "Perhaps he will tell us where we can find the so big *caballero,* Senor Sturgiss!"

The two men stopped at a Mexican saloon and slouched through the swinging doors. A fat bartender came to take their order. He squealed with surprise when he recognized the little man with the limp.

"*Senor Guiermo!*"

Bill Lee cut him short with a sharp word. Then he ordered two small beers and motioned for Manuel to lean closer.

"Where can we find Senor Sturgiss?" he whispered.

"At the *Gato Rojo,*" Manuel whispered back. "What you call the Red Cat. He bring the young American senorita, and two *malos hombres* ride with heem."

"We will take care of those bad men," Lee grunted, and drank his beer. "*Gracias, amigo.*" He thanked Manuel, and followed Johnny Siler from the *cantina.*

"The Red Cat is a dance hall and saloon," Lee explained to Siler. "Anythin' goes in the Red Cat, so loosen up yore guns."

Johnny Siler twitched his guns against hang as he dropped from the saddle at the tie-rail in front of *El Gato Rojo.* A Mexican orchestra was strumming a dance tune inside, and the long bar was lined with men who took their fun where they found it.

Short-skirted girls of several nationalities were dancing with gun-hung men with dirty money to spend. Sorrento was the gathering place for Border outlaws from both sides of the Line.

Johnny tied his horse with trailing reins, and then he was leaning against the front of the *cantina* with a lazy cigarette drooping from his lips. He scanned the dance floor from under the rim of his sombrero, and his gray eyes hardened as he stared at a table in the back of the big room.

Betty Jo Carter was sitting at the table, her

eyes red from weeping. Lem Fargo was sitting across from the girl, but Crad Edwards and Bob Sturgiss were missing.

Then Siler nudged Bill Lee. They saw Bob Sturgiss dancing with a Spanish beauty, and Crad Edwards was drinking with another girl at the long bar.

Lee ground out his cigarette and strolled slowly through the doors. He stopped at the end of the bar and ordered a drink, keeping his head bent low.

Johnny waited a moment and then walked casually up to the bar. Bill Lee edged his way along slowly so as not to attract attention, and to cover up his limp. He passed Johnny and nodded his head, whereupon Siler strolled to the back of the room.

There was a *patio* in the back. Siler went on through and took a table near an open window of the dance floor. He ordered a bottle of wine and two glasses, paid the waiter, and glanced at the open window.

All the laziness left him as he stretched to his feet, slipped across the tiled floor to the open window, and swiftly drew his right-hand gun. He stepped across the low sill, swung his arm sidewise to catch the falling body of Lem Fargo, and lowered it to the floor.

"Quiet, Betty Jo," he whispered to the girl, who was staring with fright. "May I have this dance?"

Betty Jo Carter gasped and came to her feet like a girl in a dream. She recognized Johnny Siler's voice, but he looked and acted like a stranger as he whirled her across the floor.

"My horse is at the south end of the tie-rail," he whispered with his lips close to her ear. "When trouble starts, run for my horse, and wait for me in front of Manuel's *cantina*. I won't be long, and don't talk or argue. Do just like I said!"

Betty Jo wanted to tell Johnny that Sturgiss had baited a trap just to kill him, but Siler went into another spinning whirl. They collided with another couple, and Betty Jo clutched Johnny's arm when Bob Sturgiss turned with an angry retort.

Sturgiss stopped the insult when he saw Betty Jo Carter. Siler waved Betty Jo away and then faced Sturgiss with fire blazing in his gray eyes.

"I came to Sorrento, tinhorn," Siler said in English. "And I got yore warnin' that yuh'd shoot on sight!"

The tall gambler stiffened and then stabbed for the gun on his long right leg. Betty Jo was running toward the front door, and the crowd stopped dancing as they tried to get out of the line of fire.

Johnny flipped his brown right hand and came out smoking. His flaming gun roared twice just as Sturgiss cleared leather, and the gambler went to his knees under the double impact of battering .45 slugs.

Over at the bar, Crad Edwards whirled around reaching for his gun. He faced a little Mexican with one leg shorter than the other who had just called him by name.

"Shoot if you draw, Edwards. Bill Lee talkin', and tellin' it scarey!"

Both men drew at the same time, but Bill Lee was a straight-shooting veteran. He fired from the hip and then fired again, after which he turned to cover the crowd with the smoking gun in his hand.

"Do not move, *hombres*," he warned in Spanish. "We do not want trouble with anyone else, but I never throw off my shots!"

His last words expressed his disgust as he limped slowly after Johnny Siler who was herding Bob Sturgiss ahead of him at the muzzle of his gun. The gambler's arms were hanging limply at his sides. Johnny lifted him to the saddle of a big black horse.

"Ride herd on this tinhorn, Bill," he said gruffly. "I'm takin' Crad Edwards' horse, and I'll meet yuh with Betty Jo down at Manuel's. We're takin' Sturgiss back to Acton to stand trial!"

JOHNNY had always met life one day at a time. He had fought his way when fighting had been necessary, and if he had ever been afraid, he couldn't remember that far back. He had also taken youth for granted because he had known nothing else. Now he felt old, and he knew what it was to be afraid.

Betty Jo had told him plainly that she never wanted to see him again. Sheriff Don Carter had repeated the ultimatum, and something had gone out of Johnny Silers' life. He hadn't known what it was until he had lost it, but what he wanted most was waiting for him down in front of Manuel's *cantina*, in Sorrento, the toughest town along the Border.

Johnny Siler came to a quick decision. He'd see Betty Jo safely home and deliver Bob Sturgiss to the sheriff. Then he'd sell his little J S ranch for quick money, load a pack horse with provisions, and he and Bill Lee would drift on back to Texas.

Down the dusty street he could see the yellow lights from the windows of Manuel's place. Something moved in the shadows near a thicket of prickly pear, and Johnny's gun leaped to his hand. A cautious voice spoke swiftly in liquid Spanish.

"Ride this way, *Senor* Siler. Danger awaits you at my place!"

Johnny neck-reined his borrowed horse into the shadows as he recognized the voice of fat Manuel. The Mexican was trembling with excitement, and he told his story in a whisper.

Siler had forgotten about Lem Fargo, and now the vicious gun-fighter was waiting at the north side of Manuel's *cantina*. Betty Jo sat her horse at the tie-rail, with Fargo's gun pointing at her heart. Once more she was bait for a man trap, and Lem Fargo meant to shoot without giving Siler a chance.

When Manuel had finished his talking, Johnny Siler thanked him in his own tongue.

Sometimes a man fights better because he loves someone, or he fights recklessly because he does not care. He, Johnny Siler, was a gunfighter.

Shaking out his bridle reins, he cut around to the back and rode slowly up an alley. He left his horse at the back door of Manuel's *cantina,* loosed his gun of hang, and crept to the corner of the building. Removing the big Mexican sombrero, he peered around toward the front.

Lem Fargo was crouched at the front corner with the moonlight reflecting from the naked six-shooter in his right fist. Siler told himself that it would be like shooting fish in a barrel, and that he had shot all his enemies from the front. Being Texas born, his gun slipped to his hand before he called on Fargo to turn and fight a man.

"Turn slow, Fargo. I've got yuh covered!"

Lem Fargo squinched his shoulders up and then whirled like a cat. His gun blazed as he spotted his target plain in the moonlight, and the slug plunked into the adobe wall just in front of Siler.

Fargo eared back his hammer on the recoil and started to throw down for a follow up.

Johnny Siler squeezed off a slow shot and leaned against the bucking gun for balance. Some of the sullen anger left him as the heavy gun exploded to thwack the handle against his calloused palm.

Lem Fargo was kicked back a foot or two into the clear, where he fell in a huddle with the gun spilling from his fingers. Even while his boots were drumming a tattoo of death, Johnny turned toward his horse.

But Betty Jo had dismounted and was running toward him. She was going to read him off again for being too fast with his gun. Fear gripped his heart as he cringed back and lowered his head to shut out the scorn in her eyes.

He held his breath, waiting for the lightning to strike. Then he gasped when strong rounded arms went about him after slipping in under his own flaccid arms. Johnny Siler listened like a man in a dream.

"I knew you'd come, Johnny, even after what I said to you. I knew I was being used to bait a man trap, but I was sure you would come. Please don't ever leave me, Johnny. Hold me close and say you won't ever let me go!"

Johnny promised with his first kiss because he couldn't find the words for pretty speeches. The ache went out of his arms as he held Betty Jo close, and all the bitterness fled from his heart. At last, he found the words he wanted to say.

"I won't go back home to Texas now, Betty Jo," he whispered huskily. "Home is where yore heart is. We'll build a new house on the J S, and we'll nurse the sher'ff back to health."

"Softy," a hoarse voice sneered. "After all yore raisin' and up-bringin', yuh go and throw off yore shots on this Border wolf, Bob Sturgiss. Whyn't yuh blast him and let him lay?"

Johnny Siler turned to face Bill Lee who was glaring down at him from his saddle. The old *Tejano* had plugged up the wounds in the gambler's shoulders.

"The sher'ff wanted Sturgiss alive, Bill," he answered, with his arm around Betty Jo. "Yuh can knock a man down no matter where yuh hit him with a forty-five slug. That saves a heap of killin', and I wanted to prove to Sher'ff Carter that I ain't just a hired killer. And don't worry none about yore job. Betty Jo and I couldn't get along without yuh, and yuh're our foreman for life."

Old Bill Lee took off his big sombrero and bowed to Betty Jo. Then the tough old Texan said the words Johnny Siler had wanted to say.

"I loves yuh with all my heart, little boss. Looks like I got myself ketched in the same trap that snared Johnny. Let's hit out for home, and I'll bend the lead with the prisoner."

Johnny Siler stared as Bill Lee rode out of Sorrento leading the gambler's horse. He started for his horse, changed his mind, and took Betty Jo in his arms.

"I love yuh, too, honey," he whispered in her hair. "It's taken me a long time to snare yuh, but I won't ever let yuh go."

Betty Jo waited a moment and then laughed softly.

"That's what I wanted to hear you say, Johnny," she whispered happily.

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign
Of Tired Kidneys

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

Kill Thy Neighbor

By DAN KIRBY

Sheriff "Handy" Ames has a big surprise for Jud Cragg!

MOST cowmen would have pulled long faces and sworn bitterly if they had ridden out one hot, dry morning to find their only source of water gone. But Jud Cragg was not like most cowmen. There was something akin to a smile crooking his coarse lips as he swung out of the saddle and stood staring at the dry, gravelly bed of what once had been Panther Creek.

He was not even thinking about the loss of

JUD CRAGG

water as he slipped down the bank of the creek and waded across the shallow puddles to the other side. He was thinking that at last he had an excuse to kill old "Pop" Fry that would hold up in court, and the thought set up a heavy, pulsing sensation in his temples.

He could see Pop's little three-room shanty nestling in the grove of pines about a quarter of a mile from the creek, and he could tell by the wisp of smoke that curled from the stove-pipe chimney that the old homesteader had not yet left to do his morning chores. He loosened the heavy six-gun in its holster and started walking in the direction of the shanty. Pop didn't know it, but he would never do those chores now.

Jud laughed softly and quickened his pace. He stopped when he came to the new three-strand barbed-wire fence that marked the boundary between his own and Pop's homesteads. He had built that fence himself when the drouth hit a few weeks back and Pop's cattle were needing water.

There had been plenty of water in Panther Creek then for both outfits, since neither owned but a few scraggly head of crossbreed Herefords, but Jud had fenced it off, hoping that Pop might get desperate enough to cut the wires some night. Jud thought of the many nights he had spent hidden in the brush by the creek with a rifle across his knees, just waiting to catch Pop cutting those wires.

He had known all along that Pop was a high-tempered old cuss who wouldn't take a licking without a fight. Just had figured on goading the old man into making a misstep, like cutting the fence, then shooting him. The law wouldn't hang him for that because a man had a right to defend his property. But he hadn't counted on Pop stealing his whole creek. That took nerve.

Jud crawled through the fence and strode up to the edge of the broad, shallow stream that now flowed across Pop's land. Looking up the creek he could see the sunlight glinting on the water as it emerged from the cedar brakes at the foot of the hills. This stream hadn't been here three days ago. Instead the water had flowed down Panther Creek across Jud's land.

JUD grinned and wiped sweat from his forehead with a sleeve. Pop probably thought he had been smart, diverting Jud's creek that way.

The cold hatred Jud felt for old Pop was mirrored in the ugly glitter of his piggish, close-set eyes, as he strode up to the shanty. Ever since the day he had been caught butchering one of Pop's cows he had hated the old man. Pop had taken him before Sheriff "Handy" Ames at the point of a gun and made him confess. Then when the sheriff had been all for locking Jud up, Pop had objected.

"Ain't no use givin' the onery cuss board

and room free," the oldster had said. "It ain't goin' to pay me for my cow and he'd probably as soon lay around in jail and eat off the county as earn his own grub. How about parolin' him over to me and let him work out that cow? I got some extra work comin' up and could use an extra hand."

For two weeks Jud had worked for the old nester and every day he had tortured his brain for some way to kill the old man without having to hang for it. But the opportunity had not presented itself, so Jud bided his time patiently. He had seen men hanged before and it was not a pleasant sight.

Now as he stepped heavily onto the rickety porch he felt rather contemptuous of the old man. Pop had courage but no brains. He should have known that Jud was just waiting for an excuse to kill him. And he couldn't have given Jud a better excuse. Water is a mighty precious thing during a drouth. The law will let a man go a long way to defend it.

Pop was cleaning up the breakfast dishes as Jud thrust open the door. Jud saw the look of fear that paled the old man's leathery face, and saw the scrawny body double in a crouch as the oldster's hand dropped instinctively to the thumb-buster sagging in his waistband.

Jud waved his own gun under the old man's nose.

"Hold it!" he bellowed, and relaxed a little as Pop straightened slowly under threat of the gun. "I reckon yuh know why I'm here." Jud's voice was flat, deadly, reflecting the killer lust that twisted his harsh features.

Pop Fry nodded. "I know," he said, "but I tell yuh, Jud, I didn't have nothin' to do with—"

He broke off as Jud's heavy hand slapped him across the mouth, sending him staggering against the wall.

"Shut up." Jud growled. "Whinin' ain't going to help you any." He reached out and grabbed Pop by the shirt and hauled him through the door. "That's a mighty pretty creek yuh got out there, old man." He shoved the gun deep into Pop's lean stomach. "Reckon it's almost pretty enough to die for, especially seein' as how yore cattle was shore needin' water."

Sudden anger colored Pop's grizzled face and he jerked himself loose from the big man's hold.

"Shoot and be hanged, cuss yuh!" he yelped. "I'm tellin' yuh I didn't—"

The blast of Jud's gun drowned out the old man's last words.

For a long moment Jud stood staring at the crumpled figure of the old nester sprawled across the doorway, then he slipped the gun back into its leather and started off across the field to the spot where he had left his horse.

He had it all planned what he would tell the sheriff when he went in after him. His story would be that he had gone to get Pop and haul him before the sheriff for stealing his water. Pop had made a play for his gun and he'd had to kill him. It was simple. And to prove it there was the creek flowing across Pop's land and there was his own Panther Creek dry as a bone because Pop had diverted the channel.

His horse was near the edge of Panther Creek where he had left it, nibbling at the sparse grass. He mounted stiffly and headed back in the direction of his own house. Since he was hungry he would eat before he rode into town. Besides there was no hurry now. Pop was dead and that was all that mattered.

He couldn't help the sudden cold feeling that gripped his stomach when he saw the big black gelding standing in front of his house. He knew that horse. It belonged to Sheriff Handy Ames, and the sheriff wasn't in the habit of calling on folks unless he had business.

Jud's first impulse was to wheel and run for it, but he fought down the feeling. It was not possible that the sheriff could already know that Jud had killed Pop. And even if the sheriff did know, he had nothing to fear. Hadn't he waited all this time just to be sure he would have a justifiable reason for killing the old man? Still he could not quiet the uneasy feeling that gripped him.

He dismounted slowly and started up the steps, trying to keep the fear that was gnawing at him from showing in his actions. He swung open the door and stepped inside.

SHERIFF AMES was a lean slab of a man with a deceptive, slow, easy-going manner that many a tough citizen had misinterpreted. Right now the sheriff was standing over the stove brewing a pot of coffee. He turned as Jud entered.

"Been waiting for yuh, Jud," he drawled. "Didn't hardly expect to find yuh out so early this mornin'."

Jud took off his battered hat and laid it on the unmade bed with studied casualness.

"Had some mighty important business to take care of, Sheriff." He looked at Ames and tried to keep his voice level. "What brings you out so early?" It was going to be harder than he had thought, telling the sheriff how he had killed old Pop.

Sheriff Handy Ames lifted the coffee pot off the stove.

"Pop Fry was in to see me a couple of days ago," he said easily. "He said there was a big beaver dam on Panther Creek up in the cedar brakes. He was worried that mebbe the dam would throw the flow of the creek across his spread. He said he would have told you, instead of comin' to me, but he'd been having trouble with yuh and didn't want to come to yore place."

Jud felt the strength drain out of him and

his legs turned to rubber. He sat down heavily on the bed, letting the sheriff's words soak into his numbed brain.

"I'll ride up this afternoon and take care of it, Sheriff," he finally said. "Thanks for dropping by."

Jud hoped the sheriff hadn't noticed the hollowness of his voice or the way his fingers shook as he tried to roll a smoke. If he could just get the lawman out of here maybe he could make a break for it.

Sheriff Ames sipped at the hot coffee.

"Yuh know, Jud, I'm thinkin' it's about time you and old Pop made up and quit this bickerin'. I've seen some mighty nasty killin's grow out of petty quarrels." He put down the cup and stood up. "If yuh'll get a shovel and and axe we'll drop by and pick up Pop and tear down that beaver dam this mornin'. Pop can show us right where it is, and it'll give you two a good chance to settle yore differences."

Jud tried to answer. He tried to tell the sheriff that he had already settled with Pop, but there was a tight, choking feeling around his throat and he couldn't even whisper.

Bitter Hatreds Are Unleashed and Flaming Guns Roar on the Long Trail From Texas to Dodge City as Rancher and Drover Call a Fighting Showdown in

TRAIL DRIVE

Complete Action Novelet

By CHUCK MARTIN

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Smiths Ride Fast

By TOM GUNN

When a traveling hombre suddenly lights into Sheriff Blue Steele's bailiwick and tries to put a slick swindle scheme into operation, the roaring guns of justice blast the range!

CHAPTER I

Easy Money

IN OLD Arizona a fable was told about two pioneers, who met and gave their names as Smith, living as close neighbors for the rest of their lives without uttering another word to each other.

Perhaps it was more truth than fable. For in those dangerous days it was customary for men to hide their past under the name of Smith. And it was neither polite nor prudent to question or draw them out in any way.

Such a thing could not have happened to Deputy "Shorty" Watts, because he asked more questions than a six-year-old. By remembering only a small part of the answers, he soon could have become a wise man. Or else have broken down from lugging around an overload of information.

Shorty's audacious curiosity asserted itself one winter afternoon when a stranger on a golden sorrel rode into Painted Post. He did not arrive via the stage road, but out of the south, from the direction of the Mexican border.

SHERIFF BLUE STEELE

He put up his horse in the feed corral and made for "Thimble Jack's" Saloon, where the little deputy promptly took stock of him.

The man was big and raw-boned, with bright yellow-brown eyes and a mouth drawn down at one corner from smoking a heavy curved-stem pipe. He wore a mustard-colored Stetson and there was dust on his shoulders and his eyebrows were gray with it.

The stranger's nod and curt "Howdy" included the entire gathering in Thimble Jack's place. It consisted of seven men, including the slick-haired bartender. They were Judge John Bertram, who owned T Bar T, Indian County's biggest spread, and who was playing pinochle with his old crony, Doc Crabtree, "Magpie" Stevens, the grizzled, gabby old stage driver who was warming his hands at the woodstove in the far corner, for the desert wind was raw at that season, Shorty and Thimble Jack who were confabbing over a mail-order catalogue, spread out on the bar—and Sheriff Blue Steele of Painted Post.

Steele leaned at the back end of the bar, his keen gray eyes studying the new arrival through a slow curl of cigarette smoke. The sheriff was a lean, bronzed six-footer who spoke seldom, but observed much. It was a habit as inflexible as his worn calfskin vest and the twin Colts holstered snugly to a buscadero belt, bright with cartridges.

Some men flashed two guns as a mark of vanity. But not Steele. It was widely known throughout the Southwest that those ivory-handled Colts were law along the Border. They often wrote a code of procedure that had not yet found its way into the statute books of the Territory.

THE stranger stepped to the bar and ordered a drink, and Shorty turned from his scrutiny of the mail-order catalogue.

"Not many ride up out of Mexico at this time of year," he said. "Come far?"

The man removed his pipe and answered with slow dignity.

A Complete Painted Post Novelet

Smith clamped an arm around Steele's legs and grabbed a gun

"Pretty well down in Sonora."

"Prospector, miner or minin' man?"

The man smiled.

"I see you know that there's a difference, young man."

"Shore. One won't work, the other does, and the last one works others."

"That's a good definition, coming from a cowpuncher."

"Not any more, I ain't. Depitty sheriff. Name's Watts."

"Mine's Smith."

Shorty squinted one eye shut and wrinkled his nose dubiously.

"Better be Smith than sorry, I reckon."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, some men are born Smith. Others become Smith."

Judge Bertram and Doc Crabtree lifted their eyes from their cards. Magpie gaped. Thimble Jack got ready to duck behind the bar, like a prairie dog seeking quick refuge in its burrow. There was a tense silence.

It was the kind of silence that portends trouble and it reached its peak as the man swept back his coat and there was the flash of a six-gun.

But he didn't draw. His hand returned from his hip with a tobacco pouch. He thumbed a fresh load into his pipe and eased the tension with the mild reply:

"But I'm really Smith."

Shorty pounced on that with a ready grin.

"Pleased to meet yuh, Mr. Really Smith. Where yuh headin'?"

"Really" Smith struck a match and took a few long, easy pulls before answering.

"For a doctor."

"Migosh, yuh don't look sick!" piped Shorty.

"Nothing serious. Only it pays for a man to check up now and then when he reaches his middle years."

"Well, Mr. Really Smith, if nothin' serious ails yuh, I might recommend our local pill rattler."

The other man raised a dusty eyebrow.

"Is there a doctor in this town?"

"That's him, settin' behind yuh. Nursin' three queens. He set a busted leg for me once and my feet still track."

With this lofty recommendation, the little deputy jerked a thumb toward the card table. The stranger turned and smiled blandly at Judge Bertram, who was facing him.

"Finish the game, Doctor. My organs can wait."

Bertram folded his hand and chucked it and pushed to his feet.

"Mine can't," he rumbled, snapping his watch open and shut again. "It's half-past supper time and I'm hungry as a she-coyote at whelpin' time."

Doc Crabtree grated his chair around and eyed Really Smith over the top of his specs. The doc was a smallish, brusque man.

"Could do with a bite myself," he jerked out. "How about you?"

Really Smith made a gesture of agreement with his pipe.

"Then I prescribe steak and fried potatoes," said the doc. "You can describe your symptoms while we have at 'em over at Chow Now's."

He got up and the batwing doors swung shut behind them. Magpie breathed "Whew!" and fingered his moist brow.

"Some day, yuh homely little jabberwock," he told Shorty severely, "yuh'll get yore red topknot whammed off, proddin' strangers thataway!"

"Anyway, I find out things," Shorty retorted blithely. "And I helped the doc pick up some easy money."

From Steele, then, came the first words he had uttered. They were:

"I wonder. On both counts."

Shorty had good reason to remember that cryptic comment. For next morning, when the town awoke and stirred, the golden sorrel was not at the feed-rack in the corral.

During the night, Really Smith had gone.

His unceremonious departure was the topic of talk at Chow Now's at breakfast time. Nearly everybody, including Chow Now himself, offered some interesting conjecture.

"Him no likee Chinee-Melican glub, mebbe."

"That swayback bed in the room over the saloon hurried him back to Mexico for a little comfort, more likely," suggested Shorty.

DOC CRABTREE was glum and reticent over his cup of black coffee. Steele, studying his mood, spoke up abruptly:

"He didn't hit for Mexico."

"How yuh so shore of that?" challenged Judge Bertram.

"Because he never came from there."

"But, Sheriff!" sputtered Shorty. "He told me—"

"Which way has the wind been blowin' lately?" the sheriff interrupted.

"Why"—Shorty blinked—"out of the north, of course. Like it always does durin' these cold spells."

"And the stranger's shoulders were dust-covered."

"What does that prove?" the doc shot at Steele.

"It proves that he traveled with the wind. That's the only way that hoof-dust can settle on a rider."

"Humph!" snorted the doc. "What other wise observations you got to make?"

Steele answered the question by asking another.

"What was wrong with him?"

"None of your business!"

"Don't get so ethical, Doc."

"Well, then, there was nothing wrong with him!"

"After yore diagnosis of this Really Smith hombre, you and the judge went into a long huddle with him up there in yore office. How much did he get out of yuh?"

The doc fidgeted uncomfortably.

"We didn't play cards. Said he didn't gamble."

"I know that. Really Smith packed his money in a purse, instead of loose in his pocket. That kind ain't gamblers. But they go for shore-thing suckers, ones they happen to know have a few dollars tucked away, such as you, Doc. Sayin' he needed medical attention was just Really Smith's dodge to get acquainted with yuh. And talked yuh out of—how much?"

It was plain that Doc Crabtree was holding back something. Judge Bertram, seated beside him, slowly reddened, then finally exploded:

"Thunderation, we might as well admit it, Doc! The truth is, Sheriff, he took us for five hundred cash, the two of us!"

"Creation, five hundred bucks!" piped Shorty. "What was his game?"

"The oldest game in the West," Steele answered. "The gold brick game!"

"You sure can size up folks quick, Steele," Doc Crabtree acknowledged reluctantly, "and I envy you your powers of deduction. But you made just one little slip-up in this case."

"What was it?"

"We didn't come out of the little end of the horn. And Really Smith, if he really was a bunco artist, wasn't playing any old-style bunco game. He—"

"He didn't sell yuh a lead brick, coated with gold, in other words. He sold yuh a gold brick coated with lead. Isn't that it?"

The doc's eyes went round and big behind their thick lenses.

"How in blazes did you know that?" he cried.

"That's the new twist to the old game. S'pose yuh tell the whole story."

"Show him our brick, Doc," growled Bertram.

CHAPTER II

A Price Sticker

STEELE, the judge and Doc Crabtree crossed to the doc's office in the ramshackle second story over Thimble Jack's place with Shorty and Magpie tagging along. There the doc unlocked a cabinet case and produced a heavy lead brick or ingot of paper-weight size. It had been sawed in half, evidently with one of the doc's surgical saws. This process, as Steele had said, exposed a core of pure gold.

SHORTY WATTS

The doc laid the pieces out on the case defiantly, as the onlookers crowded close to examine it.

"Now here's Really Smith's story," he explained. "It's mighty plausible and I still believe it. In spite of him vamoosing overnight as he did."

The doc paused to light a thin cheroot.

"All right, Really Smith was pokin' around in Sonora, where there's insurrectos plotting most of the time, as we all know. One night down Hermosillo way he rescued a Mexican from a knife fracas. The Mex was so grateful that next day he told Smith how the insurrecto crowd was stashing away a big amount of gold to pay for a forthcoming revolution. He took Smith to a cave where the stuff was hid."

As he paused to puff nervously at the cheroot, Judge Bertram took up the story.

"Smith knew he was takin' a big chance to try gettin' that gold out of the country. So he melted down a mess of lead in a retort, him bein' a one-time assayer, by which means he concealed the loot like yuh see here. Figgerin' that if he was caught, he could explain that he was in cahoots with the insurrectos—smeltin' lead for to make their bullets, savvy?

"He cached the lead-covered gold bricks in a new place and slipped across the Border, luggin' just this one. Was in need of money to go back and haul out the rest. And to bribe his way, if necessary. And there's the whole danged story! Now that it's told, there's two things I'd admire to know, Sheriff. How did you catch on without talkin' to Smith or anybody else? And if yuh was convinced that he was a crook, why didn't yuh nab him?"

Steele twisted a cigarette shut, touched it off, and exhaled a jet of smoke ceilingward.

"It was simple enough, Judge," he said. "When Really Smith threw back his coat and drew his tobacco pouch on the *segundo* last night, I saw somethin' heavy saggin' his back pocket. And it was also easy to see that the tobacco pouch was smeared, the way cartridge bullets smear things sort of shiny-black. I added up the rest this mornin', seein' the doc wearin' a face long as a totem pole on learnin' that his 'patient' had skipped. As for nabbin' the man, what grounds did I have? There's no law against a man packin' a lead brick. Or a gold one, for that matter."

"But yuh claim Really Smith didn't come up out of Mexico! Does that mean yuh disbelieve his story?"

A thin smile flicked the sheriff's thin line of a mouth as he drew out a pocket-knife and opened a sharp blade.

"Here's the best way to convince yuh," he said, rasping the shiny bright surface of exposed gold. "It don't shave off, does it? No. Why? Because it ain't pure, virgin gold. It's alloy. Melted down jewelry, gold pieces or such. Around fourteen carat, I'd say, judging from the hardness."

Judge Bertram swallowed hard.

"How—how much yuh reckon it's worth?" he gusted hoarsely.

Steele flipped the ash end off his cigarette.

"Two-three hundred, at a guess."

"Good Godfrey!" boomed Bertram. "Then we been trimmed out of two-three hundred!"

Steele nodded and pocketed his knife.

"Cheap experience, Judge. An old-timer like you should know better'n to buck another man's game."

Bertram rumbled a cuss word. Doc Crabtree chewed his cheroot so flat that it wouldn't draw and he threw it irritably into a cuspidor. Magpie smirked and wadded a gob of fine-cut into his gap-toothed mouth.

"Thing is, seems to me," he stated pertly, "is to figger whichaway Mr. Dustyback Smith rode from here. How about it, Sheriff?"

Through all this prolonged discussion, the usually talky Shorty had remained strangely subdued and silent. He spoke up now, with sudden fervor, slapping the blunt-nosed .45 at his gun-belt.

"Yuh blamed right!" he shrilled.

Steele shot a sharp look at him. The little deputy wilted.

"Reckon I might as well come clean," he groaned. "Mr. Really Smith, confidential-like and as a special favor, up and sold me one of them danged bricks! Which I paid for with every penny of the reward money and suchlike that I've saved up for my old age! And kept in a old sock under a floor board in the jail office!"

Magpie threw back his head and whooped heartless mirth. The whoop ended in a croak as he doubled up in sudden paroxysm and grabbed at his skinny throat.

Shorty took grim pleasure in grabbing Magpie with a wrestling hold, up-ending him and shaking the fine-cut into Doc's cuspidor.

"I should of let yuh strangle, yuh sinful old sidewinder!" the little deputy fumed, as he let go and dumped Magpie in a limp heap.

EVEN in bunco games, a code of restraint prevailed. A hardy pair of oldsters such as Judge Bertram and Doc Crabtree should have known how to hang onto their money. Blue Steele felt no great upsurge of indignation in their behalf.

But fleecing Shorty was another matter. The *segundo* was young, sociable, over-generous. Often he had dug into his small hoard after hearing some hard-luck tale. He had denied himself many things to save that nest-egg. The sheriff had reflected on that while watching the little deputy pore wistfully over the mail-order catalogue.

There was still another angle to it. In cheating Shorty, Really Smith had flung a contemptuous challenge at Painted Post law. He could tell it as a huge joke in the crook world. The story would spread and certain misguided miscreants would be led to the false conclusion that Indian County was "easy." They would be emboldened to new, crooked enterprises. The result would be violence. Such violence that, in the Border country, was the dark harbinger of bloodshed and sudden death.

"Smiths ride fast," Steele finally said.

"Yuh've got the better hoss," grumbled Judge Bertram, who by now had lost his stubborn faith in Really Smith's veracity. "Yuh're the best tracker in the Territory and yuh've got a open-and-shut case. Here's what. Bring that lyin' lobo back here and I'll donate whatever of my money yuh get off of him to a reward. How's that?"

He knew better than to have said that. Steele scorned blood-money. But the offer was an inducement to Shorty, with his empty savings sock.

"The sooner we start, the sooner we finish, huh, Sheriff?" he appealed eagerly.

Steele gave him the nod. Shorty knew what that meant. He bolted from the room and up to the feed corral. He was back in short order with their horses—his own stout black-and-white pinto and the sheriff's famous steel-dust gelding, fastest horse on the Arizona border.

It was a trying moment for Steele. An aimless, hither-and-yon dash would accomplish nothing, except to take the fine edge off their mounts, and help insure Really Smith's getaway.

In which direction had the man fled? Nothing that he had said or done contained a clue. The ground held scant indication, if any. The scouring wind would quickly dim tracks, even obliterate them. So the gelding's speed meant nothing now.

But Shorty craved action and Bertram and the doc expected it. Steele paused to roll a smoke, thinking hard.

"Did anybody see any brand marks on the golden sorrel?" he inquired casually, as he stood on the edge of the platform sidewalk, beside the hitch-rack.

"Nope," said Magpie. "It was slick."

As he spoke there shuffled from around a corner of the saloon-hotel a wind-bedraggled figure; a slight, bird-legged little man who wore canvas leggin's and soft sneaker-soled shoes.

"Dictionary!" yelped Shorty. "Where yuh been holed up durin' the excitement?"

"Dictionary" Smith, a former barn dauber or painter of wayside signs, was the town handyman. Since he had become a part of Painted Post's small, motley population nobody had taken him too seriously. He came and went at will, indulging in lonely pasears into the desert and mountains, sometimes prospecting, at other times engaging in what he called "a rest-up."

"Me?" Dictionary smiled timidly, advancing on the group by the hitch-rack. "Well, seekin' spiritual solace in the solitude, you might say. And doin' a little epicure work on the side. Old Man McCall's got a new cook up at Box L. Glory, such pies!"

Steele shot a look at him over hands cupped to a match.

"Did yuh foller the stage road down from Box L?"

"No, Sheriff. I slanted down the rim-rock to the base of the Sawtooths. Made camp last night on the headwaters of the Caliente Creek. Say, ain't it a shame how this country is gettin' crowded up? A gent rides right onto me as I set at my breakfast fire. He—"

"A rider on a sorrel?" barked Judge Bertram.

"That's the one." Dictionary nodded. "Glory, of all the doggone places to meet a stray pilgrim. He—"

"Mebbe it takes a Smith to catch a Smith, by Godfrey!" the judge snapped. "Whichaway was he travelin'?"

Dictionary looked confused at the sharp interest his random remark had caused.

"That," he admitted, "I didn't ask. And he didn't volunteer any information along that line. We only said 'Howdy', commented on the weather, and the pilgrim rode on into the juniper, northwise. Or was it west?"

"A fine memory for details you've got!" rumbled Bertram.

Steele was swinging to saddle as Dictionary, after a blank interval of staring at his feet, suddenly brightened.

"Well," he spoke up, "I did take notice of one circumstance. There was a price sticker on the pilgrim's saddle."

"Balderdash!" scoffed Magpie. "It was a old, worn saddle!"

"But it had one new stirrup," Dictionary insisted mildly. "While I stood by the pilgrim's horse, I sort of absent-mindedly picked it off."

He fingered a shirt pocket and triumphantly announced:

"And here it is!"

STEELE leaned down and plucked it from the handyman's fingers. The price sticker was hexagon-shaped and about the size of a dime. On it was inked "$2.75." And beneath a cost price in some merchant's code.

Steele flipped away his cigarette.

"Not many places where just one stirrup is sold. About as uncommon as buyin' pants one leg at a time. Good eye, Dictionary. Now we know where Really Smith came from recent and where he's headed."

He put the price sticker in a pocket of his calfskin vest and gestured to Shorty.

"Vayamos, segundo! Let's ride!"

The two of them swept out of town, leaving the group staring open-mouthed.

Up the stage road that dipped and twisted for sixty miles north, to Cottonwood on the railroad, long streamers of dust traced their rapid movement across the lowlands to the willow-fringed Caliente. Not until they splashed into the shallow ford was the pinto close enough for Shorty to splutter:

"Creation, Sheriff, all price stickers look alike to me! How come yuh're so shore just where that one come from?"

Steele didn't answer at once. He tilted his hat to the wind and gazed at the jagged, lava-capped line of the Caliente Hills to the east. Then to the west where the snow-crested Sawtooths loomed. Ahead the land lifted on a series of rim-rock benches to the central Arizona plateau.

Shorty thought he was being ignored purposely.

"Well, Sheriff, I reckon I've got it comin'," he sighed.

Steele lifted an eyebrow.

"Got what comin', *segundo?"*

"The devil. For bein' such a sucker."

Steele's rugged profile softened a little.

"Nothin' I'd say would change yuh, *segundo.* I wouldn't want it to."

"Seems like I'm cut out to die poor," gloomed Shorty.

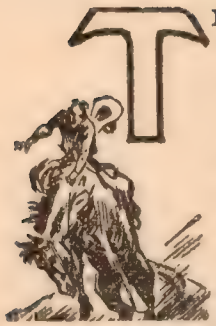
"Bein' over-generous is a noble way to go broke. And it helps a man to enjoy life as he goes along, even if he does give his money to the wrong party now and then."

Shorty felt better. The sheriff's approval meant more than money. The praise lifted his spirits and for the moment stifled his curiosity about the price sticker.

Perhaps Steele had intended it to have that effect. For now they were on the lope again, hitting across-country, toward the shoulder of the Sawtooths where Dictionary had met his namesake.

CHAPTER III

Pipe Ashes



THE Caliente had its source in a small spring flow from a *ceinega* bench that was a part of Bertram's T Bar T range. Small bands of cattle, wild as deer, leaped from sunny grass slopes and made for cover at the lawmen's approach.

The spring was roughly fenced with split cedar rails, not merely to insure its purity for an occasional human visitor, but more to guard cattle from the surrounding bog-hole.

Swinging from leather, Steele pounced on his first trail sign of the fugitive. Here Really Smith had paused to rest and smoke. A dottle of tobacco and ash on a cedar rail showed where the man had rapped the bowl of his pipe before riding on.

They were on the fringe of low, scragly juniper at this elevation. From the spring, horse tracks led across the *ceinega* and plunged into the sparse, scattered growth.

It was the instinct of a culprit to seek cover. Honest men rode in the open. In this unwitting choice, Really Smith had betrayed himself. For his tracks lay deep in the soft slope, too deep for the busy fingers of the wind.

The gelding, trained to man-hunting, quickly sensed that they were following the sign of the golden sorrel. It needed no urging. The pinto was in an almost constant trot to keep up.

The trail climbed gradually until Steele and Shorty found themselves above the junipers and in denser, more flourishing piñons. The air was sharp and the ground yeasty from nightly frosts. Undergrowth was sere and the grass scant and they flushed no more half-wild cattle, because the zone of winter range was a thousand feet lower.

The sheriff halted on a rocky headland to breathe the horses. From here the eye commanded a vast sweep, across a hammock of desert basin to the rimrock and plateau land beyond. Down in the basin the wind was raising little puffs of whitish dust on a dry lake bottom and across some sand dunes. Not far up the steep Sawtooth slope the piñons gave way to yellow pine, and above them snow gleamed under the cold, bright sun.

Steele's quick eye noted specks on a boulder and he stepped out of saddle. More pipe dottle. Really Smith smoked often and evidently didn't smoke in saddle. He had halted here and could not be far ahead.

"We'll crowd onto him by noontime," asserted Shorty, "at this rate. Yuh figger he'll put up a argument, Sheriff?"

Steele twirled and inspected the well-oiled cylinder of one Colt, then the other. "A thousand is worth an argument."

"But he got only four hundred odd out of me. All I had." Shorty strove for some more cheerful thought, then added: "Lucky he ain't had a chance to spend none. Doc and the judge might claim it was *my* money the lobo spent!"

Steele, about to mount again, tensed suddenly, the muscles hardening on the lean, long angle of his jaw. His rock-gray eyes fixed on the distant expanse below. He sighted a new plume of dust. A moving dot hove into view from one of the innumerable washes that spread fanwise from the base of the mountains. The rider streaked into the open and across the bare alkali sink, in a northwesterly direction.

The haze that the rider lifted in his haste screened him. The distance was too far to identify even his horse. How had Really Smith gained such a lead, just as they believed they were closing in on him?

"What now, Sheriff?" breathed Shorty.

Steele's answer was to rein off the trail and dash downslope, with the little deputy at his heels. Their descent was breath-taking as gelding and pinto plunged and slid. Perhaps this explained how the gap was widened between them and the man they pursued.

Beyond the alkali bottoms the rimrock country offered refuge, with its labyrinth of canyons, ideal for hiding or ambush. Steele and Shorty soon reached the hard-packed sand of the wash and came onto tracks. They spurred into a long lope and presently emerged into the windy open, just as the rimrock swallowed the rider ahead.

A wily approach was impossible. It was a stalking game no longer. The lawmen dashed unswervingly for the canyon where Smith had vanished. It was a natural fortress, where one gun could stand off a posse, if the hand that wielded it had courage and steadiness.

But Steele and Shorty knew the ground, as they knew almost every foot of Indian County. The sagacious Steele long since had formulated a strategy suited to each locality in his wild bailiwick, just as a city sleuth had a mental map of every street and alley and rooftop in his teeming district of authority.

Shorty knew this. Therefore he was prepared for the terse command jerked out as they reached the mouth of the canyon. Steele swerved right. Shorty slanted left. The move brought each to ridges that hemmed in the canyon.

They spurred in scrambling ascent, keeping fairly abreast, guns out and eyes searching every nook and cranny below.

SUDDENLY Steele signaled for a halt and slid from the nearly-winded gelding. His feet had barely touched the ground when a shot lifted clamoring echoes and a bullet

spanged against a boulder so close that the gelding snorted and danced from the sting of shattered lead on its sleek legs.

The battle was on.

Shorty saw the whip of gunsmoke from an eroded gash in Steele's side of the canyon. He slammed out two shots, knowing the spot was out of range of his .45, even on that sharp down-aim. All he hoped was to flush the hidden shooter.

It didn't work. Then he sensed another danger. He peeled from leather with the agility of a lizard and swung the pinto over the crest of the ridge as another shot cracked from somewhere below. Shorty knew gun sounds. That was a rifle shot. He heard lead hiss past close overhead as he flung himself flat.

His body struck the ground in unison with a thudding crash. He saw dust billow across-canyon. Shorty uttered an exultant yip. The sheriff had taken canny advantage of his superior position. He had dislodged a huge, round boulder. It rolled and bounded toward the gash from where the first challenge had come.

The ruse was well-played. The boulder made straight for the gash. But at the last instant it leaped clear and smashed on to the bottom of the canyon.

But it had started an avalanche of dirt and smaller rock, which showered down on the concealed gunman. This proved too much for him. He snaked into sight, dodging and stumbling as he bolted for another position.

But the man was not Really Smith! And he didn't have a rifle. The realization was a shock to Shorty. They had been led into a trap. They faced at least two enemies. But he lost no fraction of time in coarse-sighting and banging out two more shots, just as one of the sheriff's Colts spoke once.

The man yelped, dropped and rolled. He dropped into a narrow crevice.

Who nicked him couldn't be told. Nor did they know how badly hit he was. Sometimes a rattler was more dangerous after it was hurt, Shorty reflected. Anyhow, first blood was theirs. The unknown odds were reduced a little. He tried to console himself with the thought.

Shorty haunched up in an effort to sight the wounded man in his shallow concealment. The move sharply and instantly reminded him that his red mop of unruly hair made a bright target against the clear, windswept sky. The rifle cracked again and the little deputy flopped flat.

Death fingered him in that danger-fraught instant. He felt a stinging numbness in his throbbing, sun-reddened neck, squarely across the jugular vein.

With something almost akin to panic Shorty clamped a hand to his throat.

"Migosh!" he croaked to himself. "What chance have I got alone? What'll I do?"

His hand came away, sticky-moist. He stared at it wildly. He heaved an enormous sigh and went weak all over. No blood-stain.

But his shirt collar was ripped, the top button was missing and sharp, gritty particles of it clung to his pounding, perspiring neck. A rueful grin broke out on his turkey-egg countenance. He would live to tell many a shuddering listener about this hair-breadth escape. He hoped.

He squinted across-canyon, toward that little notch where Steele had halted and boosted that boulder into motion.

The notch was empty now.

Steele was gone from there.

Agitation flooded Shorty again. . . .

SHERIFF BLUE STEELE could think fast and straight in a crisis that befuddled most men. He should have expected this, he told himself severely. Lobos run in packs. The question was, how many henchmen did Really Smith have in the canyon? How smart were they? Were they determined, not merely to defend, but to annihilate?

Locating the rifleman was the grimmest need. With the advantage of cover, he could outrange any sidearms. With that thought driving him, Steele started on up the ridge. He had seen no gunsmoke with that shot that had dropped Shorty, but he faintly had heard the clack of a lever-action Winchester.

That was the one shortcoming of a rifle as a weapon.

The sound seemed to come from an outcrop of slate-colored schist that formed a low barricade on Shorty's side of the canyon, but farther up.

So Steele shielded himself over the ridge and led the gelding. The ground was almost too rugged for riding. Foothold was difficult. The gallant animal fought upward like a climbing bighorn.

Well past the schist outcrop, Steele dropped rein and crawled back to the crest, cautious of sound and movement. Before peering over, he jerked up a clump of weed. With this held before him, he inched it up before he raised his head. Few white men knew this wile. It was Apache business.

Here the canyon walls rose almost perpendicularly from the flood-scoured floor of the canyon, two hundred feet below. There was a trickle of water there and grass under overhanging ledges, a place where hunted men could hole up for a siege, until thirst and fatigue discouraged their attackers.

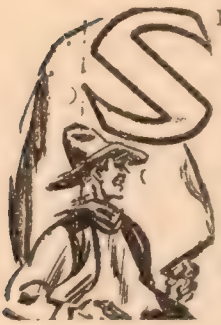
He could see behind the schist barrier. His eyes explored the length of it. He sighted nothing resembling a man. But something glinted brightly, about halfway up, where it had lodged at the base of a low, dried bush. The sun was at precisely the right angle to fling the messaging brilliance to him.

It was an empty cartridge.

It gave him a fairly accurate idea of the location of the rifleman. So he studied the area a few feet above it. He kept his gaze fixed there for what seemed an interminable interval.

CHAPTER IV

No Bottling-up



SHERIFF BLUE STEELE'S Indian-like patience was rewarded.

A hand emerged cautiously from a deep groove in the schist and groped for a hold. Slowly a man pulled himself up, head and shoulders showing, then all of him as he started a creeping climb toward the top of the ridge.

He clung to a rifle. He was broad-backed, big-hatted and deliberate in his movements.

But he was not Really Smith. This man wore blue levis. The bunco boss had worn woolens.

The man was seeking a vantage point that would put Shorty under his sights. He had to be stopped. Steele waited until he was spread out full-length on a sun-splashed slab that had fallen from the vertical outcrop.

The Colt bucked and roared. The man's legs jerked out in macabre obedience. His face struck the flat surface under him. His hat rolled off. The Winchester slid from his grasp. A few short, spasmodic breaths and the whole body slackened into the loose, ungainly pose of death.

From below came a shrill, prolonged yell. It was Shorty's range cry. Then a blather of shots as the little deputy emptied his .45. Steele ducked back to the gelding and rushed down his ridge in breakneck haste.

Three riders were spurting for the canyon mouth. They were out to kill, Steele knew that now. He and Shorty would have to fight their way down from the ridges and the time for the try was now, before the trio found forted positions.

The gunning of two unknown members of this band proved now to have a purpose and complete justification. Five of them could have succeeded in bottling-up tactics. But three were not so formidable.

Shorty rode full-tilt down his ridge, still whooping his cowboy cry. Steele hurled himself to saddle and joined the race for open ground and a final showdown.

Shorty was first to sight the three riders who maneuvered to cut off his and Steele's escape. One swerved apart from his companions, reined sharply and aimed. Shorty fired first. But in his headlong advance he missed. The other held his fire. He continued to calculate his aim until the distance between them was less than one hundred yards, easy six-gun range.

Shorty triggered and snapped on an empty. He tried to check the pinto. A fierce grimace showed on his enemy's face. The man's grip closed to squeeze out a killing shot, for the little deputy was almost on him now, frantically unloading on the fractious pinto.

A Colt jarred. The killer's grimace became horrible surprise. The man whirled half-around. The Colt uttered its noisy summons again. His shoulders jerked forward in a gesture of inner agony. He reached for his saddle-horn with both hands, six-gun dangling by its trigger guard. He dug in his spurs and rode for a tumble of rocks at the base of the ridge, where it merged into the canyon sand in a mesquite thicket.

He dropped there and crawled into the thicket, heedless of the gouging thorns. His six-gun lay in the sand where he had dropped.

Shorty had his .45 cylinder filled. The two upright survivors were seized by wild confusion.

"Botari and Garson, where are they?" shouted one.

The other, hauling frenziedly around to avoid Steele, screeched back:

"Left us in the lurch, blast 'em!"

He right away proceeded to do the same. Braving Shorty's bombardment, he tore westward, along the foot of the rimrock, riding low and hugging saddle. He ran the gauntlet without hurt.

The lone rider was hemmed between Steele and his *segundo*. He didn't wait for a command. He flung his gun away and poked his hands high.

"Don't shoot!" he yammered. "I'm done, Steele!"

Steele rode up, covering him from a Colt gripped at belt level, his rock-hard eyes glittering slits.

"Four red herring, that's our tally!" he gritted. "Mr. Really Smith is a savvy coyote! Breakin' from the pack when the chase gets too hot! Where is he?"

The man with upraised, shaky hands licked his dry lips. He was a half-bearded, unkempt ruffian with a loose mouth and small, bloodshot eyes.

"He slipped yuh in grand style," was his husky answer.

Shorty arrived with a rearing halt.

"Much obliged, Sheriff, for discouragin' that gent that invited me to ride right up his gun barrel!" he babbled excitedly. "Danged if I could hit anything, hightailin' over that rough ground!"

"Yuh wasn't much of a target yoreself, except for yore ears," Steele told him.

"That sounds like a new way of callin' a feller a jackass!"

STEELE saw the bullet rip in his deputy's shirt collar and relented.

"Yuh did fine, *segundo,*" he said lightly. "Yuh filled their eyes with smoke." He swung to the captive. "I asked yuh, where's Smith?" he crackled.

The man ran the tip of his tongue over his lips again. He attempted a wavering smile.

"Back yonder in the Sawtooths. It was me that dingled across the alkali bottoms. Yuh fell for a old trick, Steele."

Shorty swung down and picked up the six-shooter that had been cast away and, at Steele's order, retrieved the one dropped by the man who had crawled into the mesquite thicket. When he was back beside Steele, the captive was sweating under the sheriff's fierce volley of questions.

"I'm Charley Waters," he finally said glumly. "Me and the party yuh call Smith has been runnin' mates for a long spell. I sighted yuh on the timber trail from a lookout point and tipped off Smithy."

"Yuh craved to get us off that trail, to keep us from findin' whatever's at the end of it? That correct?"

Charley Waters shrugged.

"Smithy, he's at the end of it."

"Then that'll be the end of him," Steele promised grimly. "And of you, too, Walters, if yuh don't guide us straight. C'mon, let's ride."

They jogged along the back-trail, to ease the hot and hard-worked pinto and gelding. It was afternoon when they were back on the timber trail, where Really Smith had dumped pipe ash on the rock.

Steep and grassless, this far reach of T Bar T range was where cows and cowmen seldom came. That was why the presence of the trail was unknown, even to Steele. For it was recently formed. It was not a built trail. It was a mere rut worn by hoofs, quickly erased by a heavy storm.

They paused to rest. No word had been spoken on the climb from the wash below. But Steele, reaching for makings, now uttered a terse few words that jarred Waters with unpleasant surprise.

"How far from here to yore diggin's?" demanded the sheriff.

"Diggin's?" faltered the captive. "What gives yuh the idear there's any diggin's?"

Steele flicked a glance to the other, a glance that lashed him from head to foot.

"There's blue clay on yore bootheels. Yore hands are calloused from rough work, like with pick and shovel. There are splashes of candle grease on yore left sleeve. And yuh've got an underground look about yuh otherwise, Waters. Let's have the straight of it."

Waters drooped.

"Yuh know a heap without bein' told," he grunted. "I thought Smithy was smart, figgerin' a way to sell lead for a hundred times what it's worth. Mebbe yuh're smarter, Steele. Time'll tell. But I ain't talkin' no more, not any."

The winter afternoon was short and the labored breathing of the horses was plain in the frosty air as Steele pressed along the trail with Charley Waters in front of him and Shorty behind. The sheriff was prepared for surprise as he rounded each bend. He knew that the chances of taking Really Smith unaware were good, too. For if he himself, with his unusually keen vision, had been unable to identify a rider on the alkali bottoms, Smith would be equally handicapped. If he had sighted three riders returning, he might naturally presume them to be part of his own crowd. As in fact one of them was.

Once Waters craned around and began a remark in a loud voice. The sheriff chopped the obvious signal short.

"No more talk! Yuh settled that yoreself, Waters! Another yawp like that and a Colt butt will dent yore hat!"

Waters grumbled into silence. He was rankled that he had tipped off Steele to the fact that they were nearing the Smith stronghold.

And stronghold it was. Around the next twist in the trail they sighted it.

They were in a deep cleft that lifted to the Sawtooth crest. The upper part, deep and gloomy, was under snow. The rest was a long spill of naked slide-rock.

The trail ended at the edge of it. No hoofed animal could be urged over the sharp, treacherous, loose slide-rock. It was as steep as a roof. The slightest weight might start a rattling descent.

In the very center was a spill of brighter, freshly-broken rock. A mine dump. Perched on that dump stood a cabin of logs, walled up on the outside to the height of a man's middle.

Here was the "diggings." Here, Steele was convinced, was the secret headquarters of the Really Smith gang, secured from surprise attack as in some medieval castle encircled by an unspanned moat.

A THIN smear of smoke rose from a crude rock chimney. Through chinks between the logs fire-glow sent slivers of wavering light. It was nearly dark. Steele strained every faculty in calculating the hazards before him before twilight glimmered into complete darkness. There was the chance, also, that the place was tenantless, that a slow-burning fire had smoldered on the hearth for hours.

That question was soon settled. Steele's head tilted back, nostrils dilating. A new eagerness laid hold of him. A stray wind current that slanted the chimney smoke toward him carried the sweetish reek of burning pipe tobacco.

Now he knew. He had caught up with Really Smith. His next move was quick and it fetched a grunt of protest from Charley Waters. Steele snatched the captive's broad

felt hat. He slashed it in half with his pocket knife and he cut off two long rawhide thongs from his own saddle.

He slid to the ground and wrapped the two pieces of felt around his boot soles. Felt wouldn't slip on the treacherous slide-rock and it would cushion his steps against telltale sounds.

"Watch the hosses, *segundo*," he told Shorty in a guarded whisper. "And if this Waters hombre makes a sound or a move—"

"He won't, Sheriff," Shorty whispered back. "Not more'n once, anyhow."

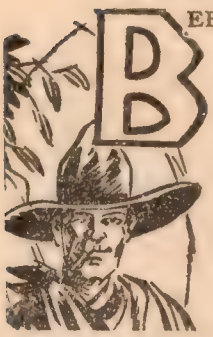
Steele started. A slinking panther could not have been more silent. He felt his way out onto the slide-rock, foot by foot and the shadows swallowed him.

He knew that there was some easier way to approach the cabin. But it was a hidden one. A search for it in the dark would be futile. And any wordy wrangle to extract the information from Waters would have proclaimed their presence.

So he was forced to this risk, knowing that one unwary step would start a miniature slide and that he would be caught midway, an open target for anyone in the cabin who would fling out a firebrand and reveal him there without cover.

CHAPTER V

The Pipe Draw



BEFORE Steele reached the dump and the small level area where the cabin stood, the time dragged endlessly. He tiptoed to the parapet and appeared through a chink. He saw nothing and heard nothing. He slithered to a wider crevice and pressed his face to it.

He smelled pipe smoke again. He saw a rough bank against the far wall and a booted foot dangling from it. He moved soundlessly to the cabin door, which faced the mine tunnel.

He toed it open, slid inside and flattened himself against the wall, both Colts pronged out toward the bunk.

"Don't move that foot, Mr. Really Smith," he drawled easily, "or yuh'll be in the market for a wooden leg."

The foot gave one slight, startled jerk, that was all, then hung there as before. A silence followed, so complete that it dinned on the ear. Then Steele heard the slow gurgle of a much-smoked pipe.

"Pardon my back, Sheriff." The tone matched the sheriff's own for composure. "I don't as a rule greet visitors so casual-like." Really Smith paused an instant, then added: "Wouldn't it be more sociable if we faced one another?"

"I didn't come for sociability."

"No? For what, then?"

"We're finishing couple of transactions concernin' gold bricks. Would that jar yuh too much?"

"Pray don't tell me that the law is interested in—"

"In bunco games? Plenty!"

"A harsh term for the loans I negotiated, Sheriff. And they were loans, represented as such."

"Yuh're loanin' the money back."

Really Smith seemed to be considering.

"The law cannot be used as a collection agency, I've been told on good authority," he finally said.

"The law's interest don't end there."

"No? Then?"

"The law, it's interested in the gold in them bricks, Mr. Really Smith. It ain't native gold. And not from Mexico. It's alloy made from melted-down gold trinkets. Loot taken in robberies committed by you and yore gang. That's where the law comes in, savvy?"

There was no more suavity from the man reclining in the bunk. His next words were edgy.

"Yore saddle connects yuh with said crimes, Mr. Really Smith. That new stirrup, more correctly speakin'. Now yuh can climb out of that flea-bag. But show yore hands in the firelight before yuh rear up. Both of 'em!"

An empty food crate served as a chair beside a crude table next to the fireplace. It creaked as Really Smith sat on it, leaning back with elbows on the food-littered table, the curved-stem pipe dangling from a corner of his crooked mouth. His light-flecked brown eyes glittered and his teeth clamped down hard on the pipe stem. Steele stood before him, close to the fire. He kicked some neatly-stacked pitch pine kindling onto it and it blazed high.

"Before we travel I'll take charge of the swindle money," he said curtly.

"Haven't got it on me!" rasped Really Smith.

"Where is it?"

"It's not on me!"

Steele seemed to abandon the inquiry. He squatted, laid his Colts carelessly on the stone hearth in front of him and reached for cigarette makings. He was deliberately inviting defiance, but Really Smith did not know that. Twisting shut a smoke, the sheriff plucked an ember from the fire, holding the blazing end of a sliver of pitch pine before his lid-veiled gray eyes.

The empty food crate creaked as Really Smith shifted his weight, taking the pipe from his mouth and tapping it empty. He swept back his coat as he had the night before in the Painted Post saloon and a hand stole toward his hip. His eyes were on Steele.

As Really Smith's hand came from under his coat, one of the Colts appeared to leap into the sheriff's hand. It roared deafeningly. Really Smith's curved pipe stem exploded into a thousand fragments, leaving him clinging to the useless bowl.

But his right hand, the one just showing from under the coat, did not cling to what it held. A six-shooter thumped to the floor.

"Reckon yuh'll have to give up smokin' for a spell," Steele said amiably, as the man before him gaped at what was left of his pipe. "Anyhow, yuh won't be tempted to make that tobacco pouch draw again. Now what were we talkin' about? Oh, yes, the swindle money. That nine hundred odd."

REALLY SMITH was unnerved. He gripped the ruined pipe nervously and his twisted mouth twitched.

"So you intend to get persuasive, huh?" he said shakily.

"In a nice way, shore. Mind bootin' that handy hip gun of yores in my reach, Mr. Really Smith? Don't worry about yore unsteady nerves. A good stiff hike back to Painted Post will steady 'em some. Or do yuh crave to tell me where yore sorrel is hid out?"

Smith's chest heaved with rapid breathing.

"It's no more likely that you'll find the horse than the money," he declared stubbornly. "After all, a citizen has some rights, even here in your bullet-ridden bailiwick, Steele."

The sheriff exhaled a billow of smoke, and flicked ash from his cigarette.

"Chances are it pains yuh to have me bring this up, but it happens that ex-convicts don't have all the privileges of citizenship," was his answer. "Hangin' onto swindle money is just one of them revoked privileges. Mebbe the hoss is stole, too, *quien sabe?*"

"Do you think I'd be fool enough to—"

As he spoke, Really Smith crossed his legs with an angry gesture that strained the creaky food crate under him to the breaking point. He crashed down. His elbows, hooked back over the table, brought that over on him.

The mishap served him with the last desperate opportunity that he needed. Steele had half-risen. The two Colts and Smith's six-shooter were at his feet. Smith projected himself at them like a striking rattler.

He clamped an arm around Steele's legs and grabbed a gun.

In the next instant they were down together, threshing and struggling, a flailing heap of arms and legs.

Neither was a stranger to this style of fighting. Smith outweighed his erstwhile captor and that gave him a momentary advantage. But not enough to break Steele's viselike grip on his wrist. The sheriff's other hand was free after the first shock of his backward tumble. A fist smashed Smith's twisted lips. A thumb gouged for Steele's eyes. He ducked his head and hit again. Blood spattered over both of them.

Smith pressed his gory face against Steele's clamped hand. That was making shrewd use of adversity. The crimson smear turned the wristhold slippery. He jerked free, jabbed the six-shooter at Steele's breast and fired.

It did not seem possible that he could have missed. But a split-second before he triggered, Steele jolted his aim aside. The bullet passed between the sheriff's arm and lean, wiry body. He grabbed hold of the bloody wrist again, with both hands this time, and Really Smith gave a sharp, agonized cry as he was thrown half-around with a bone-snapping twist and sprawled on the hearth.

Steele forced the man's gun-hand down into the fire. Really Smith cried out again and let go. Steele jerked him up and hurled him spinning into the spilled débris from the overturned table.

Then he scooped up his Colts and was master of the situation again. Really Smith hunkered down in a heap, hugging his wrenched shoulder and dangling his scorched hand.

"The loads in yore gun will start poppin' right sudden," the sheriff remarked, with a glance at the six-shooter in the flames. "Mebbe we better get out of here."

Really Smith cursed, got up and wobbled toward the door. In another moment, the cold night fanned his overheated face. Steele slammed the cabin door shut as the muffled banging started inside.

"Don't mind the fireworks, *segundo!*" he called across to Shorty. "Just set steady!"

Smith bolted for the tunnel, zigzagging sharply. He might have saved himself that exertion. For Steele made no effort to shoot. His lips tightened in a thin, hard smile.

Now he knew where the swindle money was hidden. And he had an idea as to the whereabouts of the golden sorrel. There was a pile of planks close to the tunnel mouth. And a half-empty feed-sack.

Really Smith's shout came, hollow and reverberating from the black hole under the slide-rock.

"I've got dynamite, fused and ready! Keep out or I'll touch it off!"

"You'll blow down a hunk of mountain and bury yoreself alive," Steele called to him. "Yuh haven't got the nerve, hombre. And I smell hoss in there, as plain as I smelled that pipe of yores. Bring the money with yuh, Mr. Really Smith. And a specimen of that pure lead ore. There's a gent in Painted Post known as Dictionary Smith that'll be right interested."

With a Colt across his knees, Steele squatted on the feed-sack and waited. Minutes dragged past.

"Hey, Sheriff," Shorty finally sang out impatiently, "is Really Smith going to touch off that dynamite or ain't he?"

"He is not," Steele called back, "because he dropped his matches while we fooled around there in the cabin."

He lit a cigarette with one of them. Really Smith found his voice by then.

"All right, Steele, you hold high cards and all the luck. I'm coming out."

"Don't come packin' a shootin' iron, hombre, in case yuh've got one stashed in there," Steele told him. "Because yuh'll need both hands to lay them planks across the slide-rock so the sorrel can cross."

Really Smith sputtered a feeble curse. He emerged, leading his horse. . . .

With the coming of daylight, Steele and Shorty herded their two prisoners back along the timber trail, toward the Painted Post jail and ultimate justice. Despite his cold hunger and weariness, the little deputy was in glittering spirits. Because his sock savings were in his pocket, on their way back to their hiding spot under the jail office floor.

"Only one thing left that puzzles me, Sheriff," he said, "and that is what'd yuh mean when yuh said yuh knowed where Mr. Really Smith come from and was headed back for?"

"That was easy, *segundo*," Steele declared. "He came from Yuma Prison. And he shore is headed back for there now."

"How'd yuh figger that out?"

"It wasn't hard to see that the stirrup was prison-made. The price sticker alone told that. No place else I know of where a good sound stirrup is priced at only two seventy-five."

"Creation! So he done time, huh? What for?"

"For a string of hold-ups and robberies, if my guess is right."

Charley Waters had an ear cocked to the conversation.

"There never was any evidence to prove it!" he growled.

"That," Steele said serenely, "is because the gold loot was melted down into gold bricks. Quite a scheme, wasn't it?"

Really Smith smothered another oath. Steele smiled thinly, triumphantly. Arizona's outlaw population would hear about the strange bunco game, all right. But the outcome would not furnish them with any real enthusiasm to match wits with the Sheriff of Painted Post.

Shorty's eyes shone with fond admiration.

"Cree-ation!" he blurted.

●

Sheriff Blue Steele and Deputy Shorty Watts Return Next Issue in T-BAR-T TROUBLE, *another Painted Post Novelet by* TOM GUNN

●

OF COURSE, YOU CAN'T PASS THE AMMUNITION—BUT—

You *can* see that ammunition gets right up there in perfect condition.

For it's paper which protects our boys' precious ammunition as it is transported from the war plant all the way across the ocean to the front line of battle.

So it's up to you to use less paper and help your storekeeper to use less paper. Don't ask him to wrap factory-packaged goods, canned goods, bottled goods. Carry your own market bag or basket to save his paper bags. Never use a piece of paper at home unless absolutely necessary. And, again, save every scrap of wastepaper and give it to your local paper salvage collector.

Remember—
PAPER IS WAR POWER

Use Less Paper — Save All Wastepaper

This advertisement contributed by this publication and prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the War Production Board and the Office of War Information.

They saw the wagon train drawn into a defensive circle

RED RUNS THE WAR TRAIL

By SCOTT CARLETON

Fighting Scout Buffalo Billy Bates battles in the wilderness to rescue a white girl from the hands of her Indian captors!

HALF a day's ride north of the Platte, the wagon tracks veered westward, then within a mile east again uncertainly, then west again.

"Lost," Buffalo Billy Bates said to the Pawnee scout who rode with him.

Spotted Antelope leaned over his horse's neck, studying the deep gashes in the earth carved by iron tires. He wore the blue of the U. S. Cavalry with a broad-brimmed plainsman's hat beneath which descended two braids of hair. Though proud of his Army blues, he was apt to cover the whole works with his blanket when cold, an Indian trait no army spit and polish could eradicate.

"Bad," he said, straightening to scowl westward. "They go to Sioux country."

"Then we've got to hump ourselves if we're goin' to catch 'em in time," Billy Bates said. "General Miles said to 'find 'em' and I

reckon he didn't mean find 'em after the Sioux got done workin' on them."

"They be no good if Sioux find 'em first," Spotted Antelope agreed impassively.

"Let's go," Buffalo Billy Bates said.

The scout, whose fame in Army circles had almost equaled that of his teacher, Bill Cody, seemed to the casual eye, no more than twenty-one or two. Yet there was a certain hard and reckless competence in his face that was ageless, the mark all men have who have faced death again and again and outwitted or outfought him. It is the look of a man who knows that life has no value except for the way it is lived and if that way of living brings death close, he is satisfied with the bargain.

Broad-shouldered, long and powerful of limb, Bates was a striking figure in serviceable fringed buckskins and moccasins, topped by a flat-crowned beaver sombrero. He was a walking arsenal, a heavy Dragoon Colt being strapped around his waist and balanced by a long-bladed scalping knife on the other hip, a Spencer repeating rifle riding in a saddle scabbard beneath his thigh and, as a final touch, slung over his shoulder was an Osage orange bow and a quiverful of arrows tipped with razor-sharp broadheads of steel. He was an expert with all—a superb fighting machine, a one-man army in himself.

They spurred west by north, seeing the wagon tracks grow warmer, passing the still-hot embers of the noon fires where the train had stopped for dinner. Then, in the bare, rolling hills northwest of the Platte, they caught up.

The Sioux had caught up, too.

Gunfire was the first thing they heard. Then as they topped a swell, they saw, not half a mile ahead, the wagon train drawn into a defensive circle like an enraged porcupine and spitting fire and lead from every point at a savage pressing circle of attacking Indians.

"Sioux!" the Pawnee hissed, snatching his rifle.

"Hold up!" Bates commanded. "There's fifty braves there. This calls for headwork."

But whatever plan he might have conceived died unborn. A sharp-eyed Sioux warrior spotted them and in a moment a dozen braves had left the circle and were racing out over the prairie toward them.

BUFFALO BILLY BATES stood up in his stirrups. Over to the left he saw a dry wash angling down the hill, a gash cut by rain. It had steep banks and offered the prospect of shelter for themselves and the horses. He touched Spotted Antelope's arm. The Indian saw and understood at a glance, and they dashed for the shelter as the Sioux rode, whooping, to cut them off.

Bates and the Pawnee were closer. They slid their horses down the steep side of the wash in a sudden boil of dust, ground-reined the ponies at the bottom well below the angle of flying bullets, then scrambled back up the slope to fling themselves flat and poke rifles through the grass toward the approaching Sioux.

Their Spencers hammered out defiance and lead screamed around the galloping warriors. Lances waving, war-bonnets streaming out in the breeze, the Sioux made a colorful but deadly sight. A saddle was emptied, the rest swerved away and split to try and cross the wash above and below the defenders to scatter their fire.

"Fine rescue party we are," Buffalo Billy grunted as the Pawnee slithered down and up the opposite slope to cover his back. "Now we're in a mouse-trap."

However, their deadly rifles beat back the Sioux who were in the open, without cover, while the defenders were all but unseen. The warriors drew off and sat their horses or circled about to draw fire and waste the defenders' ammunition.

Meanwhile, down on the plain, the main tragedy was moving inexorably toward its climax. The firing swelled to a savage crescendo of fury, and dimly to them came the savage war-whoops of the circling Indians. Then there was a gush of flame as a blazing arrow set fire to the canvas top of a wagon.

It was the beginning of the end. Clenching his fists in impotent fury, Billy saw the flames spread in spite of the attempts of the defenders to beat out the fire. The Indians dashed in, whooping. Then there was a distant savage worrying, snarling, like a vicious dog shaking a woodchuck.

The dozen Sioux who held Bates and Spotted Antelope pinned to the coulee reared in their saddles to see. Billy Bates peered through the grass.

The Indians had gone into and through the ring of wagons and now the firing had stopped. There was a long silence. Then the shrill whoops broke out as, the looting and murder finished, the attackers rode out again and signaled the party on the hill. With a last defiant wave of their lances and a scattering of shots, the dozen Indians broke off their fruitless engagement with Bates and the Pawnee and dashed to meet their comrades.

Clear and shrill in the air came the scream of a woman. Rising to his knees, Buffalo Billy Bates saw a flashing banner of gold—the long, streaming hair of a blond girl as she struggled frantically in the arms of a brawny warrior. She was flung face down over a horse's back and a moment later the whole war party galloped away.

Bates turned to find Spotted Antelope crawling up beside him.

"They've got a white girl," Billy said.

The Pawnee nodded. His keen eyes had already picked out the alien blond head in the rapidly diminishing party. Neither scout's

face showed any expression other than thought. Actually each was turning over in his mind possibilities of getting help, of pursuit, of rescue. It did not look promising.

"Let's get down to the wagon train and see what we can find," Bates said.

They found a ring of smoldering ashes, scattered bodies, hacked and scalped. Billy Bates moved from one to another, gloomily checking each for life.

"One breathes," Spotted Antelope said suddenly.

Bates came to his side. An elderly man, covered with blood, was watching them from pain-wracked, but intelligent eyes.

"They got—the girl," he whispered. "Grace—Langley—niece. Save—save—"

"We'll get her, old-timer," Billy Bates promised. "Don't you worry."

There was a flicker of understanding in the agonized eyes. Then they began to glaze.

Billy Bates stood up. He stared westward over the sea of waving grass, into the sun where the Sioux had long since vanished.

"You save girl?" Spotted Antelope asked. "You follow?"

Billy Bates had said what he did in an instinctive effort to ease the man's last agony, without any real conviction. But with the Pawnee's question the decision hardened in his mind.

"Looks like the only thing we can do is follow," he said. "We can't go back for help, for by the time we return those Sioux will be scattered to the devil and gone and all tracks lost. We've got to keep right behind them."

The Pawnee shrugged.

"It is death," he said calmly. "But a man cannot live forever." Impassively he gathered up his reins.

They rode west by north on the trail. To follow the ponies' hoofs was child's play for both men. The real test of plainscraft lay in their ability to avoid detection, to keep from running into a trap, to fool the keen senses of the Sioux. Their greatest chance was the possibility that the war party would never expect two men to pursue them.

They stopped, late that night, to rest the horses and to snatch in turns, a few hours of sleep. With dawn they pressed on. And by nightfall of the second day, the Pawnee began to exhibit all the nervous awareness of a dog that scents danger. "Big village come soon," he grunted. "Many lodges."

THEY left their horses in a marshy spot where willows formed a screen and crept forward on foot. Darkness was shutting down swiftly over the plain. Only in the west was a thin band of colored sky still aglow with the last bit of light. In the murk a distant row of tree-tops swam, marking the location of a stream and here, most likely, they expected to find the Sioux village.

They crossed the last bit of open ground and reached the edge of the tree belt. It seemed safer here, under cover.

Without warning, dark shadows leaped from the woods and fell upon them. There was scarcely time for thought. Yet even in that shuddering half-moment before the blow fell, Billy had time to see that the attackers were three, and time to feel the full weight of chagrin that the Indian sentries had caught them unawares.

Guns were out. He snatched his scalping knife, parried a vicious lance thrust, but felt the point tear and gash his forearm. Then he had lunged in beyond the blade and slashed at the attacking Sioux's body. The warrior twisted back to avoid the knife, jerking his lance back to try and stab again, but Billy Bates followed him in savagely, giving him no room to recover, pressing him back and keeping him off balance.

He felt the savage hot breath blast in his face as the brave fought to get back, get away from the knife and get arm's room for his lance. Billy rushed him. The Indian tripped over a root and went down. The scout dived headlong on him, the knife rose and fell, and he scrambled hastily erect.

What he saw then, he would never forget. Spotted Antelope, the Pawnee, had closed with one of the Sioux warriors, breast to breast, each striving to hold off the other's knife. But the third Sioux was loose and to keep him from attacking Billy's undefended flank, the Pawnee gave his life.

As the third Sioux charged past, lance upraised, Spotted Antelope let go the knife wrist of his adversary and, shooting out his arm, caught the scalp lock of the charging buck in steel fingers.

The Sioux was yanked completely off his feet. Almost at the same moment, the freed Indian sank his knife into Spotted Antelope's heart. Billy's frantic leap was a second too late to save the Pawnee. But his own blade drove home, to topple the Sioux beside his victim.

Billy whirled, to see a lance blade flash before his eyes, to feel the burning slash as it pierced his side and grated on his ribs. A cool detached portion of his mind told him this was the end—he was finished. But his fighter's instinct kept him boring in, moving forward even though the movement sent the spear blade deeper. The Sioux yanked it out, drew his arm back for another thrust. With a growl, Billy surged in, slashed with all his strength and felt a sudden hot wet rush along his arm. The dim figure of the Indian melted away and disappeared before his dizzying eyes.

He dropped his knife, stood reeling on his feet, with a warm wet tide running down his skin and dripping into his leggings. Then he began to stagger forward with no conscious

thought but the instinctive animal one to get away.

How long he tottered and reeled forward, tripping, colliding with trees, he never knew. He was like a man bereft of strength and reason, falling forward down an endless, dizzy incline, with his feet moving only to keep him from pitching forward on his face. And all the while his strength ebbed in a silent red stream down his side.

He came to the end of the incline at last and pitched forward and lay quite still. The night sounds closed over him, the little shy rustlings of night-playing rabbits, the thin musical quaver of a screech owl, the boom of a mosquito-hunting nighthawk. Fainter, the breeze carried the distant sounds of life from the Sioux village, but he heard none of them. . . .

He awoke to find the full moon shining into his eyes and silvering the leaves which rustled softly overhead. Something puzzled him and a moment later he knew what it was. He had fallen forward on his face, he remembered. Yet now he lay on his back. His wounded side felt strangely stiff. An exploring hand touched bandages which wrapped him round and round. He lay staring up at the trees and wondering.

There was a light step, and a dark figure bent over him. Billy felt no alarm. He was floating, light-headed with fever, in a world halfway between life and dreams. Almost disinterestedly he saw that the figure was that of a girl—an Indian girl.

"You are awake," she said in Sioux. "Do you hear?"

Billy nodded.

"The Pawnee?" he whispered.

"Dead."

He said nothing. There was nothing to say.

She inspected his side.

"The blood no longer flows. Can you walk?"

He tried to rise, found to his astonishment that his limbs might have belonged to someone else so far as the response to his brain went. She saw this with rapidly growing concern.

"I cannot carry you," she said, "but I must hide you before the light, or they will find you! Try!"

"I'll carry him for you," a voice behind her said softly in Sioux.

BILLY BATES was past caring. The girl might have jumped, if she hadn't been an Indian. Standing close behind her in the moonlight was a tall and powerful young warrior. He bent down and lifted Buffalo Billy Bates' two-hundred-pound frame with an effort and slung the scout over his shoulder. Billy Bates passed out.

When consciousness returned again he was lying on a bed of skins which smelled of Indian smoke tan. Overhead the skin sides of a teepee rose in a cone to a little circle of light at top. A tiny fire glowed in the middle. More than this he could not see, for a deerskin curtain hung between his bed and the door of the lodge.

This curtain moved now and the Indian girl appeared. She squatted down beside him and for a moment they studied each other curiously. He saw an attractive dark-skinned face with wide-set, intelligent black eyes, dark hair brushed back from her forehead and kept in place with a colorfully embroidered band.

She saw a strongly featured but handsome face, pale under its bronze tan, and wasted with fever and loss of blood. Blue eyes stared into hers.

"You are Pa-he-has-ka, the Long Hair," she said softly. "My father, who was a mighty chief, taught me that you are a friend to the red man. He said we should not fight you, for you would make medicine with the Great White Father for the Indian."

"That why you brought me here?" he asked, and was surprised at the weakness of his voice.

She nodded.

"My father has joined the spirits these many moons, and I am alone. I must hide you, for our new chief, Many Coups, is a loud talker, a breather of fire who vows to kill all the white men. He would hunt you down like a fox."

Memory stirred in Billy Bates.

"Say, how'd I get here? Wasn't there a fight? What happened to—"

"White Bird carried you," the girl said, and he remembered the warrior who had lifted him and made him faint. "Then he went back and wiped out the trail and hid the bodies of those others, asking their forgiveness."

"Who is White Bird? Your brother?"

"No." She bowed her head. Her words came, muffled and unhappy. "I had thought he liked me, but now he speaks not and his face is heavy with sadness."

He was in love with her, Billy thought, but then his mind was swiftly on another track.

"How long have I been here?"

"Eight suns," she said, after a moment.

"Eight days! What's happened to me?"

"You have had much fever and many times the spirit left your body and wandered in the woods and I was afraid that an evil Manito might come and take your body while you were away. But I prayed and made medicine and now you are back."

He thought that over. Eight days he had lain here unconscious and fever-ridden while she had nursed him. And both she and the young warrior, White Bird, had kept the secret. Why? He knew the Sioux as fierce and implacable fighters who asked and gave no quarter. What alchemy had touched this young brave and Indian girl to make them treat a white man so?

"Is there a white girl in this village?" he asked. "A captive?"

"With hair like the sun?" she breathed. "Yes, she is held in the lodge of Many Coups." She saw his face and interpreted the expression correctly. "No, Pa-he-has-ka, she has not been harmed. Many Coups is a great and fierce talker, but he is a Sioux." Pride lit her eyes and flared sensitive nostrils. "Among our people a woman is master of her person. No Sioux would touch a woman, even an enemy, unbidden. You, who know our people, should know that."

"I knew," he said apologetically. "I am sorry." He stared at her with new interest. "What is your name?"

"Kushano," the girl said. Her head drooped a little. "Cold-Heart the young men call me now because since you are here I dare let none in to sit by my fire. None but White Bird who comes only after dark."

She broke off, cocked her head to listen, then swiftly rose and passed through the curtain. Almost instantly she was back and seated herself on the opposite side of the fire where she picked up a half-beaded pair of moccasins and a bone needle. The tall figure of White Bird pushed through the hanging skin and stood hesitatingly by Billy's bed.

For a moment white man and red measured each other. White Bird set down a pair of ruffed grouse he was carrying and Kushano acknowledged the gift with a little bow of her head, but without lifting her eyes.

"You are better, Pa-he-has-ka?" the Sioux asked.

"Better," Billy Bates said, "but weak as a tiny papoose. I give you thanks, White Bird, for bearing me here. Why did you do it?"

"Not for you, White Skin!" the Sioux flashed. "For her! You are safe here, the trail is gone like last year's snows. So are the bodies of the four who fell." He rose to his lean height again. "As soon as you are strong you must go. I do not want you here. I betray my own people." He spoke with bitterness, whirled through the curtain, and was gone.

Billy Bates saw that Kushano's fingers were motionless and her head had sunk forward.

"She's in love with him," he thought. "And he with her, judging from his bitterness. But why all the violence?" Light struck him suddenly. "By the Great Horn Spoon, he thinks the girl is in love with me!"

HE WAS speechless for a moment. Then he could think of nothing to say to Kushano. Explain to her? How? He would talk to White Bird when the warrior came again. But he would not be in a hurry. For telling him the truth might suddenly cancel the protection which had been placed around him. If the white man meant nothing to Kushano, White Bird might feel less inclined to shield him.

A sound outside brought the girl to her feet instantly. She was through the curtain and facing someone in the entrance to the lodge.

"You are not welcome here, Many Coups." Her voice was clear and hard.

"Why?" The word came from a deep chest, the powerful rumble of a big man.

"I have told you why. The blood of our young men is on your head. You with your big talk of war and scalps, of loot and guns! Where is the loot you promised so grandly? Where are Red Deer and Little Fawn and Thunder Cloud and Nepta and Wabasha and Gray Wolf and Minisino and the others whose women weep for them in the lodges? Where is the glory you promised?"

"Woman, be still!" Many Coups rumbled.

"I will not be still! Always you talk war, always you wish to kill! If not the white man, it is the Mandans or the Arickarees or the Pawnees. When will you have done with killing?"

The fury of the attack left him weaponless.

"I make no council with a woman," he grumbled, backing up.

"Then go! I did not ask you here. Leave me in peace!"

She whirled inside and dropped the skin covering of the lodge door. Flat on his bed, Billy Bates saw her chest heaving, her eyes flashing. She was very human and very feminine, in spite of her stoic training. She raised her eyes to his.

"He will not come soon again," she whispered.

The days slipped by in monotonous sequence. Kushano cared for Billy Bates, fed him, tended his healing wound. She made poultices of some aromatic dried leaves which he suspected were witch hazel, and sometimes gave him herb tea to drink. She made broth of the grouse or pigeons or sage hens that White Bird brought, or nourishing stews of venison and buffalo hump. Slowly, Billy Bates' strength returned.

By the end of the second week he was up on his feet and taking his first shaky steps about the teepee. He was like a child learning to walk again, but he was heartened. From now on his strength would return rapidly.

White Bird came several times to see him, but there was a barrier of reserve between the two and behind it they fenced like cautious antagonists. They spoke of hunting, of the things that bird and animal had taught them, they spoke of the great plains, the silence and the grandeur of the mountains, the beauty of the deep woods. Behind the careful words, Billy Bates glimpsed the deeply reverent soul of the fierce warrior, the passionate love of his beautiful land. And he understood the simple, loyal soul that held so much that was good and so much that was wild and savage. They might have been friends, had things been different.

White Bird did not talk again of Kushano, nor of Bates' leaving. And Billy dared not mention the other subject uppermost in his mind—Grace Langley. But he spoke of it to the girl.

"When I leave here, Kushano, I must take the white girl with me. There are those who weep for her and she would not be happy here in the lodge of Many Coups."

"How can you steal her from Many Coups' lodge? It is impossible."

"I must try. Can you see her—tell her I am here and will try to get her out?"

"Yes. I see her when she goes to the river to bathe, to wash clothes or bring water. I will speak to her."

The opportunity came soon enough. Kushano reported that she had spoken to the white girl.

"Her face became red like oak leaves that turn in the Hunting Moon. She could not speak, but her eyes shone so that I knew she must have been unhappy in the lodge of Many Coups."

"Another week," Billy Bates mused. "One more week and I should be strong enough to travel. We'll have to plan this carefully, Kushano. Everything must be timed just right. White Bird to bring up the horses, Grace to be ready."

"But Many Coups—what of him?"

"That's my job. And I want you and White Bird out of it. I want no trouble between you and your people."

"I will get Many Coups away," the girl said. "Where I ask him to go he will go."

He was silenced for a moment, wondering. She was taking enormous risks for him. Why? She was an unusual character, he realized, but sympathy, kindness, did not go so far as to risk her own life for a hated enemy. Perhaps in her own code she was fighting for some principle he was too hardened to see.

"We must leave no sign that I have lived here," he said. "I wish no trouble to come to you over this, Kushano."

"No sign will remain," she said confidently.

A week saw their plans complete. They waited for a moonless cloudy night. When it came, White Bird was instructed to bring the horses up from the place he had hidden them and tether them in the woods not too far from the village.

"You go tonight," he said. Then his eyes moved to Kushano. "You are not ready. You will have time to pack before I return with the horses."

"I?" she repeated, staring at him in wonder. "White Bird, I—"

But he ducked his head and wheeled out through the door, giving her no chance to finish. She stared at Buffalo Billy incredulously.

"He thinks we are lovers," the white man said. "No, don't follow him now! I'll explain to him when he gets back."

THEY waited. It was two hours or more before the call of a whippoorwill floated from the timber and they knew White Bird had come with the horses. Kushano stepped outside to scout the way.

The supper cooking fires had died down and the village was dark, with only a little glow where embers still smoldered, or where firelight from inside a teepee barely lighted the blackness within a tiny circle.

Kushano's lodge was set away from the others and the shadows were thick here and black. She signaled the white man and he slipped out to stand at her side and test the night with eyes and ears. This was not the first time they had been out, late at night, and he knew the plan of the village and the location of Many Coups' teepee. White Bird had brought his weapons and he was fully armed.

"Follow in a little while and you will find the way clear," the Indian girl said.

She was gone, melting into the darkness so smoothly that her motion was invisible. He waited what seemed a long time, then cut around behind the rude street of teepees and silently as a drifting shadow moved up to approach the chief's lodge from the back.

At the sloping side of the big, gaudily-painted teepee he stopped and listened. There was no sound from within. He waited, patient as an Indian himself. At length there was a little rustling movement, then a tiny sigh. He scratched gently on the buffalo skin.

"Who's there?" came a whisper in English.

"Bates," the scout breathed.

He slipped quickly around to the front, raised the skin door.

"Grace Langley, come out! Fast!"

There was movement inside and then she stood by him. The faintest reflection of light from somewhere touched her hair and made it shine like polished gold.

"Billy Bates!" she choked. "Thank God!"

His palm over her lips silenced her. He put his lips close to her ear and barely breathed words into it.

"Take my hand. Lift your feet high. There may be stones or branches in the grass."

A dog yapped somewhere in the village, but he had not caught their scent and was not barking at them. They moved like ghosts down past the rows of darkened teepees and out across the meadow bottom toward the timber. Billy Bates softly gave the call of the whippoorwill, and ahead White Bird answered.

A few minutes later they smelled the horses and heard the young Sioux's cautious signal.

"Your saddle is here," he said, "and the pack that was tied behind it. I do not know—"

He broke off suddenly. He had caught the gleam of Grace Langley's hair.

"The white girl!" he whispered. Fury choked him, flattened his voice to a hiss. "You have betrayed Kushano!"

His knife leaped from its sheath and he lunged at Billy Bates. Barely in time the scout wheeled from his horse, caught the descending arm and wrestled with the brave.

"Stop!" he whispered urgently. "Listen, you fool! Kushano is not for me! She—"

"She goes with you or you die!" White Bird panted, trying to wrench his arm loose.

He was stronger than Billy now. They thrashed in a blind circle while the white girl, terrified, crouched against the horses, unable to interfere.

"Will you listen?" Billy Bates hissed, hanging on desperately. "I tell you Kushano—"

"Kushano is here," the Indian girl said from the darkness.

The struggle stopped. White Bird let his arm fall limp and staggered back.

"You came in time," he muttered. "I would have killed him."

"I came to say farewell," Kushano said.

"You are not going?"

"Was there ever one so blind?" Kushano said helplessly.

"Listen," Billy Bates said. "Kushano does not love me. She nursed me back to health because she hates war and killing. She helps me rescue the white girl because her heart is big and it is filled with sadness at this one's sorrow for home. Kushano does not love me."

There was a little silence.

"Kushano loves you, White Bird," Billy said. "Is it not true, Kushano?"

"It is true," she said simply.

There was a little fragment of sound from White Bird as though his armor, too, had been pierced. Billy saw the two shadows that were White Bird and Kushano move together.

"Go back to your lodge," he said softly. "Tomorrow, when the white girl is missed you will know nothing of it, for you were busy tonight with your marriage vows. My heart goes with you. Some day I may be able to repay for the life you have given me."

They gripped his hand, Indian fashion, one at a time, then they were gone. There was no visible emotion, yet Billy Bates knew he was leaving two of the best friends he'd ever have; and he knew he'd never see them again.

"Time for us to be movin'," he said to the blond girl in English.

HE LIFTED her into the saddle, gathered the reins of both horses in his hand. Then he stopped, the hair on his scalp lifting. Arm's length away stood a dim and shadowy shape.

"Did the foolish Kushano think I was a child?" came Many Coups' rumble. "Did she think I would swallow her lies as the trout swallows the May-fly? I followed her here to witness her treachery. Later I will deal with her and with White Bird. Now I deal with you, white man!"

He was coming, a charging phantom in the night. Billy Bates sensed rather than saw the slash of the tomahawk, ducked under it and ripped a savage punch to the chief's middle. It bounced off layers of steel muscle, barely slowed him up. The tomahawk slashed again, but wild. Billy ripped his sheath knife free.

They circled each other, both half-blind in the blackness of the woods, each tensing for the swift final charge. Billy leaped in, stabbed, felt his arm blocked and gripped. He was no match in his still weakened condition for the powerful Sioux, and knew it. He thrust a leg behind the Indian's and tripped him, hoping to break loose.

But Many Coups hung on grimly and they went down together and rolled in the dry leaves of the forest floor. At these close quarters the Indian could not chop with his tomahawk, but he tried to shove the blade at Billy's face to break his hold. The white scout ducked his head away from the jabbing blade and bore down with his knife wrist, but felt it immovably held.

They strained and thrashed on the ground and then Grace Langley came suddenly to life. She slid from the horse, bent over the struggling men and suddenly gripped Many Coups' scalp lock with both hands.

The fierce pull she gave brought no cry from the Indian. But it yanked his head back and in the sudden unexpected pain his grip relaxed. Billy Bates tore free and then Many Coups rolled like a cat, breaking the girl's hold and lunging out of reach. Both men scrambled to their feet at once.

The girl was within inches of the Sioux. With a strangled snarl of hate he swung up his tomahawk and aimed it at the dull shine of her hair. It was his last mistake. Billy Bates leaped in like a wildcat. His knife swept up in a vicious curve.

There was a little strangled gasp from the Indian. The tomahawk slipped from his fingers, he started to fall. Billy Bates caught him.

"Mount!" he panted to Grace. "We'll have to take him with us—can't leave him here to be found. Hurry!"

Dawn found them far southward, with no sign of pursuit. Many Coups lay under a cairn of rocks as befit a war chief, miles back on the trail. Ahead were the endless rolling plains that led to the white men's forts.

But Billy Bates looked northward toward the village they had left.

"They're wondering what happened to you and Many Coups, I reckon," he said. "Or maybe not. Maybe they're busy goin' to the wedding celebration of Kushano and White Bird." He added softly, "Good luck."

Then he turned back to the girl.

"They were plumb white, under their red skins," he said. And he saw in her eyes that she understood.

Hondo scuttled behind a post, and opened fire in the teeth of the barrage

A Complete Novelet

Retribution

CHAPTER I

To Rescue a Girl

THE brassy heat haze lay like a pall over the bottomlands and made "Hondo" Wing's faded blue eyes squint. It filmed the tight hide over his high cheek-bones with sweat and plastered the checkered shirt to his big torso.

Across the rock-dappled half-dried creek a pair of dirty russet buzzards sat on the exposed ridge-pole of a caved-in shack and watched his passing. To the east, a thunder-head gathered over the saw-toothed hills. But Hondo Wing was not aware of any of those things. Again and again, like a taunting apparition in the shimmering heat waves, the face of "Cinco" Gray rose before him. Lean, with dudish side-burns, and one black eyebrow cocked over a devilish yellow-flecked eye.

Hondo Wing, Mistaken for a Fighting

at Faro Flats

By T. W. FORD

At such moments the big vein in Hondo Wing's forehead would start to pulse, and his lips would stir slightly in their bracket of savage lines.

"No danged tinhorn of a gun-flipping gambler can run off with my woman," he would mumble, and get to thinking of Rosa-Marie with her babyish chin and the lips as red and soft as a ripe berry. He would shake his great shoulders and realize then that one of his hands was vised around the butt of a thonged-down Colt.

Ahead lay Faro Flats, the town whence this Cinco Gray hailed. There he had returned with Rosa-Marie, the girl he had stolen.

"Rustled," Hondo muttered, as he spat out the charred stub of quirly. "No other way he could get her to go."

He was riding into Faro Flats and finding this Cinco. Then he was going to let daylight

Marshal, Accepts the Gunfire Challenge!

into him and nothing was stopping him until he made Cinco Gray pay. And when he had saved Rosa-Marie he—

From the tail of his eye he caught the splatter of sunlight off a rifle barrel up on the wooded knoll. Trouble was hunting him. In an instant he rolled halfway back, kicked his near leg over the dun's ears, and was hitting the trail dust on the far side from the ambush gun. *Whee-up!* the rifle slug went as it burned by and into the leaves of a cottonwood. Then came the reverberating smash of the Winchester report. There were two more quick shots, then slow-returning stillness.

Big Wing rolled and scrambled to the sun-baked clay bank at the water's edge, both his hoglegs leaping free. He peered through the alkali-coated brush. Up on the knoll three gunsmoke puffs hung like smoke signals. Foliage stirred up there and a blue-shirted shoulder appeared briefly by a bullberry bush.

Wing smashed two bullets at the spot where it had showed. He got an answering bullet that whined off a nearby boulder. His lips twisted angrily. The range was too great for his short-guns, and the dun cayuse with his rifle in the saddle-boot had trotted into a clump of scrub pine down on the other side of the trail. Open ground lay between him and the horse.

WHAT had Wing puzzled was how Cinco Gray had known he was coming. Snapping another shot at the knoll, he edged upstream to where some reeds swayed in a backwater eddy. Slipping off his flat-crowned sombrero he cocked it over a couple of reeds. The hat showed just over the bank, shifting back and forth as if the wearer were reconnoitering. Almost immediately a shot slashed the water some yards behind it. Satisfied, Hondo Wing bent double and moved upstream in the shallows.

A dry wash branched off from the rocky creek. He worked up it to where it became merely a dip in the trail. He waited half a minute. A shot rang out at the sombrero. In the same instant, Wing hurtled his body across the alkali strip and into the high grass on the far side. No lead burned around him.

"Dang sloppy parcel of bushwhackers," he snorted as he crept toward the trees on the knoll.

Gun hammers eared back, big body moving catlike, he advanced through yellow pine and alder thickets. Near the top of the flat-domed knoll he cut toward where the rifle had spoken.

Pushing through matted brush, he found himself abruptly at the edge of a small clearing. Sunlight struck him blindingly.

From across the open space came a scared cry of warning. Wing saw a bony-faced man in levis leap for a big tree stump. Wing triggered over the stump and muzzle flame lashed at him as he lunged sideward. Lead sizzled through the leaves to the right of his head. The two guns in his big hands bucked and coughed at the spot across the clearing from where the lead streamed.

A pain-ripped curse came to Wing as a slug plucked at his shirt sleeve. Leaping back among the trees he scowled through the slow-writhing gunsmoke. There was an aperture in the foliage to his left. Through it he spotted a man stretched prone behind a log, a rifle barrel to his cheek. Hondo Wing pumped slugs through that aperture. One of his weapons clicked empty.

A sultry breeze ruffled the leaves and closed the hole. Wing whipped his eyes to where the other two gunmen had been. They were gone. And he still hadn't picked out Cinco Gray. He lunged out, intent on forcing a face-to-face showdown. Something moved in the trees over to the north. Wing hammered a shot at it through the sunlight's glitter and flung himself flat in the grass. He was outflanked, and they could get him in a deadly cross-fire, he realized.

He didn't dare move enough to extract fresh shells from the double cartridge belts at his waist. He would be spot lighted in the sun glare, a perfect target the instant he left the ground.

Then, around a projecting tree root, the muzzle of a black Colt edged like a baleful snake's eye. There was a cold slithering through the grass tops. Lead from a weapon at the other side of the tree base whipped by Wing's ear. He flattened himself against the earth.

"Senor Snake, take the belly out of the grass so I get good look at you, *si*, 'fore I send you to shake the han' of *El Diablo*," sang out the man behind the tree. He had a melodious voice, its softness unmistakable.

Hondo Wing leaped up.

"Mescal Mike!"

"She is you, Hondo? *Dios*, I kill you! You know that?"

"Mescal Mike," formerly christened Miguel Pancho Jesus Lanza, waddled out from behind the tree on his bandy legs. He was a pot-bellied stumpy block of a man with a smiling babyish face and guileless moons of eyes. The ragged gray-shot hair that hung over his forehead contrasted strangely with the youthful face. A third gun, mate of the two he gripped, projected from his taut waistband. A knife with a silver-filigreed hilt stuck from a sheath lashed to his pants leg. Beaming, he limped forward on his stiff-kneed right leg.

"Nice day for somebody die, hey, Hondo? You—"

The drum of departing horse hoofs cut him short. Hondo Wing leaped across the clearing and ran through the trees on the far side of the knoll. He came out just in time to see two ponies vanish into a mesquite jungle. It was too late for pursuit. He came back, then eyed Mescal Mike.

"How come yuh happen to be draggin' yore tail down in these parts, Mike?" he demanded suspiciously as he came back.

Mike Lanza had been a loyal tophand for Hondo's dad when he was building the Cinch Ring Spread. His liquid eyes dreaming over a slow-strummed guitar belied the speed with which he could shuck gun iron from holster leather. When the old man died, and a bad horse had lamed Mike's leg, Mike had dragged his war-bag into town and opened up an eating place.

"Ho, I don't know, Hondo." Mike became interested in a grease spot on his tie beneath his ragged bolero. "I say to myself, 'Miguel, you get too fat in the pants. Maybe you take a little pasear south.'"

Hondo Wing towered over him, scowling. "Yuh been follerin' me, Mike! Tryin' to ride herd on me, hey?"

Mike shrugged. "Oh, no, *hombrecito.* I just ride 'long behind to be ready to pick up the pieces. Maybe see you have nice grave in Boot Hill. *Por Dios!* When I hear them shots half-mile back, I come pronto, Hondo! You know who these fellas was?"

"Mebbe." Wing frowned. "Only I figgered that when Cinco Gray dealt 'em from the bottom he wouldn't fumble."

HE PUSHED aside a branch, and there was the prone man with the rifle he had spotted before. He was stone dead.

He was a small man in gray with a brand-new pearl-gray sombrero beside him. His rifle had commanded the trail where it bowed out to the creek's edge. Mike came over and rolled him face up.

"This fella, I hope he don't owe nobody any money. He be long time paying him." He pointed to the red-blotched bullet-hole in the man's chest. It had messed up his blue silk shirt. "Such a fine shirt, too."

Hondo Wing knew in a glance he had never cut the man's sign before. The fellow had scrubby red hair, thinning at the temples. He had been in his late thirties, had a cruel hawkish nose and a black patch over a missing left eye.

Wing picked up the dead man's Winchester and broke the rifle lock. Two shells gone. Mike's brown paw folded over the rifle barrel and he shook his head.

"Nope, Hondo," he said. "This fella no bushwhack you."

"What?"

"Gun barrel, he cold. No shoot for maybe hour. No die here either, this fella. Not enough blood on the ground."

Hondo bent, frowning. "I see, Mike. But I no *sabe.*" Then it came to him. Perhaps the slick, bragging Cinco had tried to frame him into a killing. Mike's arrival had upset the scheme.

Mike took his arm. "Look, Hondo, you be smart fella now and come home. They waiting for you."

"They bought themselves chips now, Mike. I'm stickin' and calling till the last card. But you go home and take care of yore business!"

"Business, he no good anyway." Mike cocked an impudent eyebrow at Hondo's scowl. "That Faro Flats, she one tough pueblo, Hondo. Me, maybe I just happen to drop in there behind you, like I no know you. When the trouble he start, I help you. *Quien sabe?*"

With a slow wink, he turned and moved off into the trees to where he had left his pony.

As Hondo himself started away his boot toe kicked up something that flashed. When he picked it up he saw that it was a cartridge shell. But it was the casing of a .38, not a rifle shell. Then he noted two tiny holes near the base as if something had been hooked onto it that held it. It was not a spent shell from any of the guns that had been fired from the knoll. He pocketed it.

When he got back down to the trail and prepared to swing into the saddle of the dun with the broken ear, he discovered something else. The saddle-horn slid toward him as he gripped it, the kak almost falling onto his chest. Then he saw that a caroming rifle slug had neatly severed the cinch strap of the saddle, barely grooving the horse's hide.

He hauled the hull clear and swung up on the blanket pad.

About an hour later he came up on a homesteader's two-room shack. The bearded plowman said he could patch up the cinch strap. He had a pot of java brewing on the back of the stove and gave Wing a cup.

Hondo sipped it while he mused through bluish quirly smoke. They would be waiting for him in Faro Flats. And it was a salty enough pueblo at best, a lawless patch of perdition itself at the head of the Big Chingo valley. But he was going there to find Rosa-Marie.

CHAPTER II

Salty Pueblo

THINKING of Rosa-Marie and her gentle innocent ways, some of the bleakness left Hondo Wing's faded eyes. Back in Purvis she had worked at the Sundown Palace, singing old-fashioned songs to her own accompaniment at the piano. But she wasn't the usual run of dance-hall gal. She refused to live at the place, boarding with the respectable Mrs. Crockett instead. Aside from a few sips of wine, she never drank.

And there was an air about her that made men keep their distance.

She had told Hondo Wing about her dad, a retired banker, who had come West for his lungs. She had been in a convent when he died, leaving her penniless. She had taken what work she could get. Everybody in Purvis respected her, save "Pop" Clement who allowed she was smart, and waiting for bigger game. Nobody paid him any heed. Pop was the town drunkard.

Hondo and Rosa-Marie had been engaged to wed when the flashy Cinco Gray had breezed into town with his gay ways and fancy duds. His trick of sweeping his stovepipe hat low when he met a woman, and his amazing luck at cards hadn't hurt him either. He had paid court to Rosa-Marie. So it was inevitable he and Hondo would clash.

They had. One night Hondo had overheard Cinco Gray make a slurring remark about women. Townsmen had prevented Cinco from drawing. When Hondo's fists had battered him into the gutter Cinco had come up snaking a knife from his sleeve. He had been gashed when Hondo disarmed him. And Hondo warned him to stay away from Rosa-Marie.

A week later when Hondo had ridden back into town Cinco Gray was gone. So was the girl. A note awaiting Hondo at the Palace told him:

I am going away to marry Cinco Gray.

Hondo had gone half haywire. In vain his uncle, who helped him run the Cinch Ring, told him it was the girl's own business. He had told him, too, about the powerful bunches operating in Faro Flats.

But Hondo had been adamant. Rosa-Marie didn't know what she had ridden into.

"Suppose yuh do burn him down," Hondo's uncle had argued. "Then what? This Cinco ain't broke no law. And you know the governor's proclamation—any hombre pulling a gun 'cept in self-defense is an outlaw. Hondo, yuh'll be branded a killer and hunted with a price on yore head!"

But Hondo had ridden off. Now he was here, a few miles from the Flats. When the homesteader clumped in with the mended saddle, Hondo described the dead man up on the knoll, the gent with the reddish hair and the patch over one eye. The homesteader's voice dropped guardedly.

"That's Tombstone McCaffrey. He's one of the Haldeman bunch—right close to Ed hisself. In fact, as close as Cultus Strachy is. Cultus is Ed's straw boss—if yuh care to call him that."

Hondo Wing knew that Faro Flats was said to be run by several gangs. Ed Haldeman's crowd was one of the biggest, and Haldeman owned half the Flats. If his men were up on the knoll with the bushwacking Cinco Gray, it followed that Gray was one of the Haldeman outfit. It was just plain logic that it was Cinco who had tried to get Hondo Wing. Nobody else in those parts had any score to settle with him.

The homesteader led the way out and slung the saddle over Wing's dun pony.

"But Haldeman and the whole pack there in the Flats—specially that Cultus Strachy, and Dengriss, too—they'll be singing low plumb soon," he remarked as he tightened the mended cinch strap.

Stories had come out of Faro Flats about Dengriss, too. Dengriss was one of the bosses. He wasn't a big money man with a cow outfit to back him like Haldeman was, but it was said that little happened in the Flats in a way Dengriss didn't want it to happen. He had a way of enforcing his personal law with guns that spoke from the darkness and were gone before the corpse hit the dust.

"What makes yuh think so?" Hondo asked the homesteader.

The man's head jerked around. "Ain't yuh heard? Culpepper Cantell's comin' to Faro Flats!"

Everybody knew of the famed Culpepper Cantell, marshal on the governor's special staff. A plain walking hunk of perdition when he cut loose with his hardware. The man who had run the gun wolves out of Cottonwood after a sunrise hanging party with fourteen nooses. The man who had rid the Chickwa Basin of long-ropers. He had named the day and the spot "Coffeyville Al" Harris would die, and had walked away from that spot ten minutes before sundown on the designated day with Harris like a broken sawdust doll in the dust behind him.

Yes, if Cantell was headed for the Flats, the tinhorns and gunslicks and noose-cheaters had their day of reckoning due.

As the homesteader chattered on a rider turned into the yard, a hatless figure with a huge head. It was just Hugo, the idiot from the Flats, the homesteader said. Harmless. Hugo rode up and nodded, gawking at them with albino eyes. A big toe poked from one of his cracked boots.

WING dug a hand in a pocket to pay the homesteader, impatience gnawing at him. He had to get to the Flats before Cantell's arrival and get his score settled. For the deadly-shooting Cantell was merciless toward anyone he considered a law-breaker. And the special marshal boasted that he carried his court of law—judge, jury and sentence—on his hip.

"And I can open court on danged short notice!" was a Cantell saying bandied up and down the whole country.

Wing yanked his hand out with some cash, a piggin' string, a bandanna, all tangled up.

A slightly tarnished silver lawman's star badge fell on the ground, glittering in the sunlight. It belonged to the deputy of the Justice of Peace back in Purvis. He had been cleaned out in the last game of friendly stud at the office and on the last round had put up the star as a joke. Hondo had won the pot and walked off with the star, meaning to return it the next day. But he had forgotten and Charlie had left town on some business.

The colorless eyes of Hugo, the idiot, bugged as he eyed the fallen badge. Then, without a word, he turned his crowbait and galloped away. The homesteader looked sheepishly at Hondo Wing.

"And I should be tellin' you about the marshal," he said.

"Why not? I didn't even know he was comin' this way."

The homesteader swallowed. "Shore, shore. . . . Well, anything yuh say."

Riding down the trail, Wing jammed the deputy's law badge deeper in his pants pocket. He had almost lost it in the barroom at Last Stage where he had eaten last night, but had seen it on the floor as he got up from his table. That had been right after the two orey-eyed gents had wobbled away from the bar and breasted the bat-wings outward. One of them had had two parallel knife scars bisecting his cheek.

Hondo remembered that when he had reached the tie-rack he had heard the pair pounding over the bridge planks on their way out of town. They had seemed to be riding dead hard for a liquored-up pair.

It was late afternoon when Hondo rode out of a gulch and saw Faro Flats, a ramshackle town that looked as if the buildings had been dumped helter-skelter along the wide lip that projected from the long slope of hill. Some of the scattered debris seemed to have leaked over, to gather with other shacks and paintless stores and logpole places, in a fresh cluster along the yellow mud flats of the dark river.

As Wing entered the lower part of the Flats he saw, propped on the bank on spiles, a long barnlike place with a gallery across the front. Its sign read, "The Red Ace." From the upper level of the town came a constant hum from the crowds on the sidewalks, and wagons and horses were as thick as flies at every hitch-rail.

Faro Flats was booming. There was money in the rich range grass of the Chingo, and in the fast-developing silver lodes over the pass to the south. Money for the bands that ranged up and down the valley. And there was never anything like a semblance of stiff law in the Flats.

Wing dropped off his pony and led it, seeking to be as unobtrusive as possible. A pot-paunched man with thumbs tucked in his galluses called to him from the sidewalk when he saw Wing's thonged-down hardware.

"Lookin' for a job, hombre? Roge Tuohy's up at the Horseshoe Bar hirin' men for his outfit. If yuh're proddy on a trigger, yuh can get yoreself a hunderd a month and cartridges free! Tuohy's havin' rustler trouble."

Wing thanked him and said he would look around first. As he moved on the unpleasant thought struck him that, knowing he was coming, Cinco Gray might hide out. And there was Culpepper Cantell to figure on. There was no advance warning when the gun-terror of the Law moved in. He was simply there suddenly, slamming the trigger on the stem-winders he had sized up and selected in advance.

That was one of the terrifying things about Cantell. And for a gent who was talked about across the whole state scarcely anybody knew what he really looked like. Hondo had heard a horse trader describe him as rangy and sharp-featured, with cold blue eyes, only to have a drummer in the next breath insist that Cantell was a small handsome man with eyes as black as the pits of Hades. When he traveled he used an assumed name. His trick was to ease into a place, size up the lay-out with his deputies, and spot the men he wanted, all unbeknownst to anybody.

There might be a lull. People would figure it was just talk that Culpepper Cantell was due. Then in some dawn or bloodshot sunset guns would start rattling, and Cantell would be striking. Wanted men would find their hide-outs known, their pards cutting loose from them, pards over whom Cantell had held the threat of criminal pasts. Deputies would appear out of thin air, men who had drifted in earlier posing as cowhands on the grubline, or traders. And almost before the gunsmoke had cleared, with maybe a few prisoners rounded up, the slam-bang ruthless Cantell would be riding out.

THAT was what he had to fear, Hondo Wing realized—Cantell in action without advance warning. And if he, Hondo, were settling with Cinco Gray at the time—

He snapped his big shoulders back. No sense in wasting time. He was going to find Cinco—and Rosa-Marie.

Where a broad alley strayed off toward a bend in the river stood a rundown store with "Eats & Drinks" soaped up on the window. Cinco wouldn't enter a pack-rats' place like that. So he might find out where Cinco was at without tipping his hand.

Just as Wing turned into the place there was a commotion down the alley. A fat gray-headed man with a bleeding face stumbled into sight from a little clump of sun-withered trees. His cringing posture with half-lifted hands was terror incarnate. Two gunnies holding hoglegs on him followed him into view, the taller bearded one loosing a string

of curses that would have peeled the hide off a cast-iron mule.

"Sixteen piddlin' dollars!" he cried. "Next time we catch yuh if yuh ain't packin' somethin' decent, I'll let daylight into yuh, Standish!"

The few others in the alley had scuttled to safety. In the main road men drew back from the head of the alley lest there be gunfire. But nobody attempted to interfere. A window was slammed up in a shack down the alley. A friend of Standish's poked out his head and a Frontier model Colt.

"Duck, Stan!" he yelled, then cut loose with the gun.

One of the hold-up pair buckled in his tracks as if his spine had been broken. The other slapped a wild shot at the man in the window, then ducked into the brush beside an old shed, running hard.

A tall man in black stalked around the corner from the main road. He was rangy, clean-shaven and might have been handsome if it weren't for the chill harsh stamp of his face. He carried a black bullwhip. At sight of him Standish flung himself behind the puny protection of a small discarded crate.

"Jervis!" the tall black-clad man called, and the second hold-up man stepped into view from behind the shed, smoking gun lowered.

The tall man strode down toward him with an inexorable air. At five paces he plucked a double-barreled derringer from his flowered waistcoat. It spat twice and the hold-up gent slammed down in his tracks, chest blasted.

The black-clad man turned and walked out of the alley.

CHAPTER III

Lawman?

IN THE bar of the mangy place Hondo Wing had headed for, he wondered if he had been dreaming. He had seen a bold-faced hold-up in broad daylight by two men who hadn't bothered to mask themselves. One of them had been about to escape when a black-clad man, no lawman obviously, had stepped in and shot him dead, walked away. And aside from Standish's friend at the window, nobody had done a thing. And their only interest now was in hurrying up to the main parts of the Flats to meet the stage that was coming in.

Wing picked up his drink from the counter formed by a broad plank propped on two barrel heads. A stooped man on a homemade crutch banged the plank angrily.

"That's that snaky Whip Dengriss for yuh!" he cried. "Folks'll say now how he's on the side of law and order, by grab! But Jervis was his own man and Dengriss killed him because he failed and his pard got caught. That saves Dengriss of bein' charged with havin' a danged hand in it and—"

"Ain't yuh leakin' from the mouth a heap, Charlie?" said the fat greasy-faced bar boss.

A heavy shadow splashed on the floor beside Wing. He turned his head quickly, to see a man outside glide away from the open window. Two customers went out with the exaggerated slowness of men who don't want to seem to be in a hurry. Wing glanced through the windows, into the alley. Three men were idling at the far side of it, hands never straying far from their hardware. Further back, two more were leaning against a tree, facing the store. Hondo glanced out the doorway. He saw one of two other men, perched on the steps of the cabin across the road, start to whittle suddenly and industriously. A hoeman was hurriedly getting a cart with his wife and child on the box away from a hitch-rack.

Cinco Gray had sprung another trap on him, Hondo figured, but he waited calmly.

A bunch of horsemen swung down from the main town and pulled up before the two-bit place. They came in, headed by a stocky man with well-oiled hair slicked down beneath his pushed-back hat. He slapped down money and ordered a round.

"A drink for the—uh—stranger, too," he said in a deep bass.

"Shore, shore, Strachy," said the bar boss servilely.

Hondo Wing swallowed. Cultus Strachy, straw boss of Ed Haldeman!

The drinks were downed in a gulp. Strachy eased over to Wing, his swarthy thick-featured face a blank. Behind the bunch Hondo spotted Hugo, the idiot. Hugo's empty eyes traveled from the two silver dollars in his hand to Hondo as if he had struck pay-dirt.

Strachy gestured toward the door.

"We better be easing along."

"Yeah?" said Hondo. "Why?"

"Mister," Strachy said, "them gents outside are gettin' proddy. They know—sooner or later—it's them or you."

There was nothing else to do. Hondo Wing went out with them. Strachy's men formed a tight ring about him as they swung up and hit down the broad alley in a gallop. When they turned up a path that slanted along the hillside, Strachy, beside Hondo, glanced back and slowed.

"Here comes Ed," he said.

Ed Haldeman, a stooped, fleshy-faced man with a parsonish look, pulled up abreast. He stuck out his hand at Hondo Wing.

"Marshal Cantell, I'm plumb glad to welcome you to Faro Flats!"

Slowly it came over Hondo Wing that these

men had not come to trap him, had not been part of the bunch watching the two-bit bar. Then he recalled Hugo, and understood. Hugo had spotted the dropped deputy star out at the homesteader's and taken a short-cut to town with his information.

"I'm not Culpepper Cantell," Hondo Wing said as they moved on up the trail.

Haldeman's thin lips smiled.

"Marshal, I'm backin' yore play, whatever it is. The Flats have got to be cleaned up."

"I'm not Cantell. My name's Wing—from over Purvis way."

Haldeman winked wisely. "Yuh're boss here, Mr.—King. Whatever yuh want to be called it is. But I'm smack square behind yuh, Marshal."

Dusk was settling as they rode further around a bend in the big hill and came upon Haldeman's place, a sprawling dobie in Mex style with a white wall around it. They rode under the arched gate and walked down a passage to the coolness of a lush patio. Strachy and three or four of the men tailed along. In a big richly furnished room off the patio, Haldeman brought out a bottle and poured drinks, then was seized with a fit of coughing.

WHEN the drinks were downed, Haldeman sat huddled in his chair a moment, weakened by the cough. He was plainly a sick man. Then he began to talk.

"Now, Marshal Cantell—"

"I'm not him. I—" That was the last time Hondo denied it. He would let it stand, for he could see how he could use the misunderstanding to his advantage.

Haldeman made an apologetic gesture. "All right, all right—Wing. Of course yuh realize those were Whip Dengriss' men outside that barroom. They had yuh spotted."

Hondo said nothing, keeping one thumb hooked in a gun-belt.

"I'm laying my cards on the table, Mar—uh—Wing," Haldeman, big boss of the Flats, went on. "This has been a rough country and I played it accordin'. But the old days is gone. This country is full of opportunities for real business. And it's got to be run under Law—to give it a chance to grow. Gunslicks and tinhorns have got to go!"

Hondo smiled faintly. Haldeman was a rich man now, with heavy holdings and investments. Law would be to his advantage, to make certain nothing would be torn away from him by the gun scum of the Flats.

Haldeman did some more talking. He admitted he had killed two men, but it had been a fair draw, and in self-defense. He admitted hiring men who were no stranger to a gun butt in their palms, too. It was necessary in this wild country.

"But my men are behind yuh now, Marshal. I—" He broke off, seeing the frosty light in Hondo's eyes. Hondo was remembering that it was "Tombstone" McCaffrey, a Haldeman man, who had been planted on that knoll. "What I mean, Marshal, is that—"

"What he means is," put in Cultus Strachy, "if yuh need help, screech and we'll come a-runnin'." He flipped the gold watch-chain spanning his white vest. A brassy shell hung from the chain.

"Yes," Haldeman seconded. "And if yuh've got anything on any man in my outfit, just say the word and—"

"None of the boys ever busted a cap on a man unless they were called," Strachy declared flatly. "If anybody's charging 'em with anything, they got to stand a fair trial!"

Haldeman hurriedly suggested they eat. He got talking about the new wing he was going to build on his hotel.

After they ate, they rode back to Faro Flats. Hondo played the card he had been saving then, speaking with the cold authority of a law marshal like Cantell. He just wanted this one piece of information.

"Met up with a hairpin from here," he said. "Feller called Gray—Cinco Gray. He abouts now?"

Ed Haldeman fought off a cough and met Hondo's eyes.

"Cinco was a gambler. Used to sit in games at my place right frequent. Just five days ago he got killed. Two men got him. Both got away, but we know they headed south. I sent word to the sheriff at Calcedo just across the county line."

Hondo swallowed hard. Fear for Rosa-Marie twisted his throat. "Did he marry that girl I heard him talkin' about?"

"Where'd yuh meet Cinco, mister?" Strachy asked.

Hondo eyed him from spurs to greased hair. "You demandin', feller?"

Strachy tongued out his quirly butt and clucked to his bay mare.

They swung into the wide main street of the booming Flats. At the fronts of honky-tonks and saloons, coal-oil torches lapped at the shadows. As they dropped off their ponies before the Faro House, Haldeman's hotel, Hondo could sense the cold, guarded eyes following his every move.

A squat figure ducked around a wagon, brandishing a fist at Hondo Wing, his conchaed sombrero perched at a drunken angle. It was Mescal Mike.

"*Ohe*, you beeg wind-belly! I think you tough with your talk, Senor Cant-tell! You come after me, the bes' caballero in—"

One of the Haldeman men barged at him. Mike sent him staggering between the rumps of a couple of ponies at the tie-rack with a neat trip.

"Hey, you Mr. Cant-tell!"

Mike bared his teeth and drew a finger across his throat. Hondo strode by him, stony-faced.

In the lobby with its stuffed furniture, Haldeman pointed out the barroom, told Hondo everything was on the house and that he would rejoin him shortly. Then he entered his office and Hondo sauntered into the barroom with its gilt-edged mirrors and gaudy chandeliers. In the rear were gambling tables. Hondo ordered a drink, wondering what his next move should be.

CINCO'S death was an unexpected blow. Now he didn't know how he was going to find Rosa-Marie. He was believed to be Cantell, and the gun-terror of the badlands wouldn't be asking after a girl.

The bar began to be crowded. There somebody joggled his arm persistently and he turned to find Mescal Mike there, behind a huge cigar.

"Look, Hondo. I been with some of that Dengriss fella's crowd," Mike whispered rapidly. "They got you branded for Cantell, Hondo. They think I'm fella whose cousin got killed dead by this Cantell. You *sabe?* I be with them. But when the trouble she start—" He winked.

"Cinco's dead," Hondo said. "Rosa-Marie—"

"Hondo," Mike said, "Cantell, he don't leave this town alive—if they're still alive. An' Hondo, that hombre with the black patch over his eye, back on the knoll"—he meant Tombstone McCaffrey—"he not with the Haldeman bunch then. He—" Mike's eyes speared Hondo's shoulder. Then he wheeled and ducked away.

Cultus Strachy's hand fell on that shoulder.

"Mr. Cantrell"—he thumbed over the top of the bat-wings toward a passing column of riders—"them's Whip Dengriss' pack! They're headed out through the pass."

The drink wrangler peered through a window and whistled softly.

"Yep, them Dengriss' men," he seconded.

"Mebbe they're draggin' their tails," Strachy hinted. "Which means Whip is down at his Red Ace with just a few house hands around. Was yuh aimin' to go a-visitin', Cantell?" He toyed with his watch-chain with the shell linked to it.

Hondo's eyes followed the twirling chain. The shell was held by a little golden pincers hooked into either side of it. And another pair of pincers was—holding nothing. Strachy followed his gaze and laughed.

"From my first gunfight—with rustlers," he said. "Them's the shells of the slugs I put in their heads."

Hondo dropped a hand into his pocket where lay the shell with the punctured sides he had picked up on the knoll.

"One of yore shells is gone," he remarked.

Strachy glanced down again, blinked. "Danged if I didn't lose one! . . . Well, gimme the word if yuh're hittin' for the Red Ace."

That clinched it for Hondo Wing. Despite Mescal Mike's information about Tombstone not being with the Haldeman bunch when he was on the knoll, Hondo knew that Cultus Strachy had been there, had lost his second shell there. That meant that Haldeman was waiting to run the doublecross knife deep in his back, believing him to be Cantell.

But that was only of secondary interest to Hondo then. Cinco, the man who knew what had happened to Rosa-Marie, was dead, but somehow she must be found. It looked as if he'd have to drift around, hoping to pick up some word of her. And as Cantell, that would be risky business.

Beside him a waxy-faced card dealer leaned across the counter to confer with the bar boss.

"That beef buyer from K. C. is back there, Al. Lookin' for that baby-faced gal called Rosa—somethin' or other."

"Rosa-Marie is her name," Al said. "Last I heard she was down at Dengriss' Red Ace."

CHAPTER IV

Doublecross

LIKE a man trying to move a frozen limb, Hondo Wing finally unpried the hand clawed over the lip of the bar counter. Cultus Strachy was over by the slatted front doors, jawing with a fat man. Hondo eased behind a buxom brassy-haired house entertainer, stepped through the door and made his way into the back hallway unobserved.

He strode down it and opened the door to Ed Haldeman's office without knocking. He had to make certain Haldeman didn't work his doublecross, taking him for Marshal Cantell. He looked over the head of Haldeman at his desk and saw that there was a back door. Haldeman smiled, making no move toward the silver-butted Colts lying beside the inkwell.

A few minutes later, when Ed Haldeman lay trussed and gagged in a closet, Hondo glided through the shadows beneath the trees behind the hotel. There was a low scimitar moon over the ragged hills as he moved down the broad alley. It paralleled the main street, meandering over the sand between low brush behind the backs of the buildings.

The hubbub of the main street drifted on the sultry wind as Hondo dropped downhill, half running. He loosened the guns in his strapped-down scabbards as he caught the dark glitter of the river below.

There was an open space between the main town and the section that crouched on the mud flat below with hovels and tent shelters

strewn around. As he wound through them, a couple of riders thudded down the road on his left. As he passed through a stand of cottonwoods another horseman came from the main town. Then behind the fringe of furtive lights on the mud flat he sidled between a closed store and a shed and was opposite the Red Ace. It was so quiet in there he could hear the drink wrangler whistling "Buffalo Gal."

Three men passed along the beaten path, barely inches from Hondo.

"Dengriss' place shore is like a grave tonight," one of them said. "See his bunch head out?"

"Yep. And they didn't come back neither. Even the rag-tag from the shacks around seems to have closed up. Rats desertin' the ship, mebbe."

They passed on, boots creaking in the stillness broken only by the lapping of the river water.

So that was the way Hondo was taking his Cantell rôle. All he wanted was to find Rosa-Marie and take her away. He followed a long shadow across the road and sidled quickly to the entrance of the barnlike Red Ace.

The bartender's whistle hit a shrill crescendo that scraped at the nerves. Before it finished he had dived from view, for one of the bat-wing doors had slapped back against Hondo Wing's thick shoulder as he stood in the entrance. From behind him came the patter of furtively scuffling boots. Down toward the river, the door of a shack scraped as it was yanked open hurriedly.

Hondo sensed trouble building but he wasn't eating crow now. His eyes raked the place as he kept his hands away from gun butts. He didn't want to smoke it out if it could be avoided. Then it was all too late.

The lone man at the end of the bar swiveled his hip to hide his go for his holster. Over at the table along the side wall, a bony splinter of man let the cards of his solitaire layout flutter and his hands were under the table. Beyond the doorway of the darkened dance-hall end, a spur rattled and Hondo sensed shapes in the shadows, the shimmer of gun-barrel steel.

"I'm looking for Rosa-Marie," he snapped out.

The bullet that gouged the post beside his shoulder told him they knew him for the deadly Culpepper Cantell. No ruse of asking for a girl fooled them. Instinctively he had flipped his body sideward to half crouch behind a table. One of his guns spattered twice into the dancehall. A shriek rewarded him. And then a slug raked the table-top over him.

He saw the door that had opened beyond the far end of the bar, saw "Whip" Dengriss' tall figure before the gun mouth licked red from there again.

"Get the lobo!" somebody yelled.

Hondo heaved up, kicking aside a chair and hoisting the table on a shoulder so it hung like a shield before him. He bulled forward, knowing now he had walked into a trap. The living skeleton with the solitaire layout pumped another shot from beneath the table, then tried to flee. Hondo shed the table with a crash and the little bag of bones somersaulted into the wall, crimson spurting from his head.

A bullet nicked Hondo's right boot as he hit for the center of the floor, one of a volley flying in under the bat-wing doors. The trap had strong jaws, all right.

From behind the bar the whistler straightened with a buffalo gun. Then the apparently slumbering figure that had been sprawled at a table in a corner shot from its chair, ant-hill sombrero flying behind. Mescal Mike poured a bullet down the bar and the drink wrangler folded up, buffalo gun clattering atop him.

"We take whole place apart, hey, Boss?" yelled Mike, as he popped up into sight with a couple of cocked guns.

THE red slash of flame bit from the door that had opened again where Dengriss had been. The charging Hondo triggered almost simultaneously. Both missed. Hondo

"I'll Run this Job My Own Way—and Nobody's Bossin' Me!"

THAT WAS what Rusty Beale, new Sheriff, told Jim Anderson, owner of the Five Dot spread, when Big Jim came around to dictate policies. Rusty's defiance was a courageous act—because Jim controlled all of El Segundo Valley—and how the ranch owner went about getting revenge provides a fistful of thrills in SIX-GUNS AND A HUNCH, a rip-roaring action novel by W. C. TUTTLE, one of America's most popular Western writers.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

ducked down the front of the bar and ran along. Around the rear corner of the bar came the gun arm and the head of the lone drinker who had covertly drawn as Hondo entered. Hondo's boot lashed out and the man's gun flew toward the ceiling. He hurtled backward, face battered in.

There was a hissing sound as Hondo rounded the corner. Twenty feet of bull whip uncoiled like a striking snake from the half-open door where Dengriss was. It wrapped itself around Hondo's left wrist like a live thing, searing the flesh, seizing the arm in the grip of a vise.

One of Hondo's Colts fell from his numb fingers. His arm was almost jerked off as he was yanked across the floor. He fired once from his knees with the other gun and saw one of the tall Dengriss' legs buckle. The door slammed on Dengriss.

Agony-wracked, Hondo darted a glance toward where Mescal Mike had been. But the little Mex was sinking slowly behind the bar. A bullet from outside had crashed a bottle and sent the glass spattering. A chunk of it had opened a red-spurting gash over his eyebrow.

A bullet whined from the back and Hondo dropped behind a chair. Before he could pick out anything in those shadows, the double side doors of the place were blasted open as if dynamited.

A handful of gunnies fronted by Cultus Strachy barged in. Hondo recognized them vaguely as men he had seen in the Haldeman bunch.

The doublecross had been sprung!

Hondo scooped up his dropped gun and scuttled behind a post as he opened fire in the teeth of the barrage they slammed at him. His right gun snapped empty as two of them went down. A big splinter peeled off from the pole before Hondo. Behind him the old piano jangled as lead fanged into its strings.

Strachy had flung himself behind an overturned table. Then the rim of that table was chunked off and a crouched man nearby buckled with a bullet in his center. Mescal Mike had risen from behind the bar with blood streaming over his blandly smiling face and his hardware chanting. It turned the tide.

A pain-maddened wounded man reeled at Hondo. He stepped out from behind the post and brought his hot gun barrel slashing across the man's face. The fellow catapulted backward to crash into a Haldeman gunman edging doorward. Cultus Strachy straightened from behind the table, playing his final chip, his greasy hair suddenly bedraggled over his blanched face.

"Cantell, you—" His shot swallowed the rest.

Hondo Wing triggered once. Strachy's bullet took him in his unfeeling left shoulder and half-twisted him. He hit the trigger again and the hammer came down on an empty. Cultus Strachy was twisted up on boot toes with half his head blasted away. He caved over the table where the solitaire player had been, pawed blindly at a falling red jack, then lay sprawled with legs and arms dangling in air.

"Hondo-o!" Mike shrieked. The Mexican's own hoglegs were empty and he was half-blinded by the blood from the eye gash.

Hondo wheeled. The whip leaped out from the door of the dark room, cleaved off half his hat-brim, raked the side of his face, taking hide with it. Hondo's empty gun tumbled to the floor and Dengriss stepped out, bringing the double-barreled derringer from his flowered waistcoat. He showed a gold tooth in a smile as he took two strides closer.

There was a ripping sound as Hondo clawed at his shirt. Then he whipped a small .32 from a shoulder hideout and gave it twice to Whip Dengriss right in the throat. Dengriss went backward through the door of the black room. His body smashed to the floor and he rolled over with the butt end of the bull whip clenched in his hand in death. A tongue of blood seeped over the doorway on the floor.

Through the batwings a man flew in with half his head caved from a gun-barrel blow. Ed Haldeman panted in after him, backed by the rest of his outfit. Haldeman snapped a bullet at one of the late Cultus Strachy's bunch who was trying to drag himself out the side door.

"Thank Gawd, Cantell!" Haldeman cried, half-choking against a coughing fit. "You're still alive! I was warned that Cultus was buildin' to doublecross me some day!"

Mescal Mike slopped over the bar, tugging at a cork.

"Senores, the drinks are on the house!"

A little later, with his nicked shoulder strapped up and a rude bandage on the side of his whip-gouged face, Hondo Wing walked out of Haldeman's office in the hotel. A lot of the lights had gone out in Faro Flats and the din of revelry was gone. But there were furtive noises. The drum of hastily departing hoofbeats. Doors slamming as owners left their shacks for the last time. The jingle of spurs as scared men skulked down alleys on their way out.

AS Ed Haldeman jubilantly put it, every gun-passer and tinhorn in town was hightailing. Gunning down Whip Dengriss had done it. He had been supposed to be invulnerable.

"I'd heard stories about yuh, Cantell," Haldeman said, patting Hondo's good shoulder. "But I never knew it was done like that. Single-handed practically. When I got word Cultus had gone down there after yuh, I . . . But yuh might have trusted me, at that."

Hondo muttered something. His own business was still unfinished. Then he was galvanized by a soft voice in the hotel lobby.

"That was a lovely ride, Mr. Algair. And we missed all that gunfight, too. Let's have some drinks sent up to the room, shall we, honey?"

Hondo reached the lobby just in time to see a woman in a scarlet sheath of dress ascending the wide stairs. She clung to the arm of a red-faced man who sparkled with diamonds. Hondo's lips formed the name "Rosa-Marie" but he couldn't say it.

"That's Diamond Jack Keller, the gambler," a man at his elbow said. "He cleaned Cinco Gray of his bankroll before Cinco was killed that night."

Hondo Wing needed to ask no questions. He knew now that Cinco Gray had not duped that girl. But it hurt.

* * * * *

Just before Hondo and Mescal Mike turned into the gulch below the flats on the home trail, Hondo reined up to look back.

"Like I try to tell you," Mescal Mike said, "she's like this. I hear him from the fellas in Dengriss' bunch. That Whip, he had scouts watching for Cantell. They see the law star fall out of your pocket at Last Stage and they are sure you are him. That Cultus sold out Senor Haldeman and was with Whip."

"Yeah"—Hondo nodded, picking up the reins—"he was figgerin' to take over Haldeman's outfit after they had settled Cantell—me."

"Sure. That Tombstone fella with the patch—he was jus' their bait. They kill him and leave him on that knoll so that when you come up and see him, you, Mr. Cantell, will think Haldeman is trying to get you. Then you would go after Haldeman. *Sabe?*"

A horseman came plunging from the gorge at a hard gallop. He drew up, mopping his face.

"Hey, gents, you get the news from Calcedo?"

They said they hadn't.

"Well, the sheriff cornered the two gents that killed Cinco Gray over there!" the rider said breathlessly. "Strung 'em up to a cottonwood!"

When he had gone on, Hondo Wing urged the dun a little faster on the road back home. He might have been one of those killers—hung or hunted down like a coyote. He had come to blast Cinco. It wasn't pleasant to muse on.

They rode a couple of miles and Mike spoke again.

"Hondo, the same day you left town, the new school-marm she come. She one pretty girl, Hondo. She's got her the big blue eyes and hair red like—"

Hondo Wing chuckled.

"Mike, I was just thinking. When Cantell does blow into Faro Flats, he's going to have the devil of a time convincin' folks he is him. . . . What color did yuh say the school-marm's hair was, Mike."

How to prevent inflation in one easy lesson

PUT THAT MONEY BACK IN YOUR POCKET!

When a lot of people want the same thing, its price goes up.

Americans have more money today—much more—than there are things to buy with it.

So every big or little thing you buy—that you can possibly do without—cuts supplies and bids prices up on what is left.

Rising prices spell inflation. And every inflation has been followed by a cruel and bitter depression . . . men out of work, homes lost, families suffering.

We don't want inflation: we don't want another depression.

4 THINGS TO DO to keep prices down and help avoid another depression

1. *Don't* buy a thing you can do without.
2. *Never* pay more than the ceiling price. Always give stamps for rationed goods.
3. *Don't* take advantage of war conditions to fight for more money for yourself or goods you sell.
4. *Save.* Buy and hold all the War Bonds you can afford—to help pay for the war and insure your future. Keep up your insurance.

HELP US KEEP PRICES DOWN

A United States War message prepared by the War Advertising Council; approved by the Office of War Information; and contributed by this magazine in cooperation with the Magazine Publishers of America.

Joe howled and dropped his gun as Marv's gun clicked on an empty chamber

Ride a Dead Horse

By JACK STERRETT

Marv Taylor had to prove his innocence—even though it meant facing the inferno of the Chuckawalla Trail

BIG, bearded Ralph Grew stared grimly down the dark and steady bore of his line-rider's big .44. His beefy right hand halted abruptly in its motion toward his hip, hung poised for a still and deadly moment over his own low-swung weapon and stopped.

He took a deep breath and relaxed from his bull-shouldered crouch, snorting like a stallion attempting to relieve himself of the cramp of the hackamore. His back against the door-frame of Marv Taylor's shack he took stock of his helplessness, his deep-set eyes gray flints.

"I wouldn'ta believed it," he said.

The lank, high-shouldered cowpoke he faced echoed the sentiment. The blond-headed puncher's feelings were as bitter as his boss' eyes. Had he ever been told he'd throw a gun against his hard-hitting, square owner he'd have called the speaker a liar and backed up the words with lead or muscle.

Grew was a man without sentiment or softness, but an absolute straight-shooter and the man Marv Taylor admired above all others. For the first time they were at cross-purposes with everything Marv valued at stake unless he could make the older man see reason.

"You got the deal," Grew rasped. "Go ahead and play your cards."

The cowboy's blue eyes were steady against the flint of Grew's stare. His weapon did not waver a hair as he searched his mind for words that would convince his boss of his innocence, but after a moment he shrugged his shoulders and gave up.

They had already fought it out verbally and Grew's mind was set on what seemed to be the obvious facts of the case. The growing heat of their argument and his own desperation had forced him to reach for his gun the instant before Grew could find his.

But Grew was right about one thing—from now on he had to play the rest of the hand out with action. Further words were useless. He made his decision.

"Straighten up and lift yore hands," Marv ordered.

Grew glared and obeyed sullenly.

"Turn around."

As Grew turned, Marv stepped in quickly and flipped his boss' six-gun from its holster, then hooked forward a chair with his booted toe.

"Sit down," he ordered.

Marv's calloused big hands were deft at the trick. He'd roped too many a steer and bawling calf, thrown and hog-tied them for branding, not to be swift and sure. In split seconds, Ralph Grew was bound as helplessly and immovably to the chair as was possible. Only his bitter and flint-gray eyes could move.

ACTING swiftly, Marv threw a few cans of beans and tomatoes into a saddle-bag, filled a big canteen with fresh water, checked his gun-belt and six-gun, picked up his Remington and stepped to the door with his load. Before going out he turned, his hat pulled low over his eyes, his lips slanted in a thin line of regret.

"Sorry, Boss, yuh forced me to this. For the last time I'm telling yuh I didn't lift the G-Square payroll. Jeb and Hal Kress were—"

"The twins are dependable boys," Grew interrupted roughly. "Always have been. They delivered a bunch of steers to the railhead and I told them to pick up the payroll money from the station-master and bring it as far as yore place to save the long trip back to headquarters. They brought it!"

"Yuh'd done better to tell them to take it directly to headquarters instead of being so anxious to get them back out to timberline without the loss of a day," Marv said. "Yeah, they brought that big wad of money here, all right. Had it in a saddle-bag. Only thing was, it was rolls of paper with ten-dollar bills wrapped around. The real payroll went away with them—as I was too late in discoverin'."

Grew's face was blank with disbelief. The way the boss figured, if Jeb and Hal Kress had meant to steal the payroll, they had wasted a lot of time coming all the way back just to plant a fake bundle of money in Marv's shack. It didn't look at all reasonable. They could have spent those hours getting a head-start out of the country.

That was just where they had been so devilishly clever. They knew it would look entirely unreasonable and had aimed to gain whole days, not mere hours, by throwing the suspicion on Marv.

"Okay, okay," Marv sighed. "I can see what yuh're thinking. Boss, when you get the bit in yore mouth, yuh can't be turned."

"Happy hunting, outlaw," Grew growled contemptuously. "I hope yuh like the owlhoot trail, but don't think yuh've seen the last of me. I'll run yuh down if it's the last thing I do."

Marv's bony young face was grim, almost ugly, with complete and final determination.

"Don't worry," he rapped. "I'll be back and I'll be bringing the money. If a dime of it's been spent I'll be dragging those boys dead and not alive."

For the barest instant, Grew's face had the look of a man whose mind could not help but feel the intensity and utter sincerity of the lank cowpoke. But his face closed up again immediately, and his voice remained contemptuous.

"What's yore plan—if yuh've got one yuh won't lie about?"

"I'll hit the Chuckawalla Trail," Marv said. "If I was on the fly, myself, and in a hurry to get outa here that's the way I'd go. I figure that's the way they've gone."

"It's a burning inferno of a desert. This time of year it's near a man's death to try to cross it."

"It's worth trying," Marv nodded, "to anybody in a doggone hurry. It cuts off a hundred miles, and three days' time, compared to the long trail around."

He could see that Grew was still disbelieving anything he said. Indeed, it was almost unbelievable that anybody'd try to cross Chuckawalla just now, but Jeb and Hal were clever and he was sure they'd be smart enough to take the chance.

MARV searched Grew's face for another instant, felt himself shut out, and gave it up once more. He straightened, turned and went out the door.

"So long," he said over his shoulder. "See you soon."

"Yuh'll pay for this!" Grew roared savagely, and began to struggle furiously with his bonds.

Those ropes would hold for a time,

Marv told himself as he saddled up and slid into the leather. He'd done a good job on that hog-tying. All he needed was a head-start.

G-Square owned nearly all this range-country.

It owned a wide section of deep, broad valley where the grass grew belly deep in season and a thousand tons of wild hay was put up each summer. It owned deserts and badlands and high, forested mesa and benches, on up to the crested snow ridges of the Troopers, which were its northern boundary.

From those glaciated peaks, a G-Square rider could, literally, bee-line due south for three days before reaching the abrupt and clifflike breaks of the rim-country which dropped sheer into the blazing sand-hell which was the Chuckawalla and the southern boundary. Beyond the Chuckawalla, a haze of blue distance away, lay Mexico.

Nobody owned the Chuckawalla and save for the big lizards, the horned toads, scorpions and tarantulas, nothing lived there—the air was too thin and the sun too hot. It was sprawling and horrible death, the very frying-pan of perdition.

Yet the Chuckawalla could be crossed by men with sufficient desperation and savvy, and with a knowledge of saving the last ounce of their horses' strength.

That Jeb and Hal Kress, the squatty, broad-shouldered twins, had come this way was firm in Marv's mind next morning when he reached the rim at sun-up. The hour before utter dark, last night, he had been following their double trail and he rested now at the spot where it broke down the rims toward the desert.

That Marv stood on the trail this morning was accident. He had seen enough the evening before to know where the outlaws headed and had bee-lined through the night without attempt to read or follow the trail.

Evidently he had guessed right, for the shortest distance between two points had appealed to the brothers, too. He had found their trail again here after the briefest pasear each way along the rim. He was fresh from a four-hour sleep and his horse had digested a hatful of oats. Both would need the last ounce of their stored-up strength.

Before taking the plunge on to the ugly show-down which lay ahead, Marv ordered his thoughts and considered the possibilities. He'd been across the Chuck a time or two before.

As he looked back through his memories he remembered that Hal and Jeb Kress had questioned him curiously, more than once, concerning the landmarks to be followed and the location of the one sulphurous waterhole, Badwater. That water could be used, very sparingly, and the traveler who missed it had only the barest chance of surviving the crossing.

The twins would be heading for Badwater and wasting no time. Even with their three or four hour start on him, Marv felt, he could reach the sinks of Badwater almost as soon as they. *His* trail would be straight and he'd be wasting no time, he'd be making it. His face was savagely grim as he lifted his silk bandanna across the bridge of his nose and secured it there.

DURING this season, the nights cooled the Chuck but little. The sun had been up barely an hour when a thermometer would have shown a reading of 110°. It went on up mercilessly, one-hundred ten, one-hundred fifteen—twenty! It could soar even higher. The question was how much man and horse could stand. But Marv and his wiry gelding were both tough and wise.

The Chuck crawled with the heat. The vast desolation of the alkali flats wavered like an unending and eternal carpet carried up on a hot wave, rose up and vanished in the sky. It was a burning moon-scape. Traveling those desolate and blinding levels was like treading up, up and always up, into blinding space. The few landmarks quivered, weaved and distorted themselves. They writhed and convulsed in their agony and seemed now here, now there, now nowhere at all.

Before his very eyes, Marv saw a black ash-heap of volcanic rock appear and disappear again. Fire-tongs grappled his lungs. Through blasted nostrils his body struggled for air and his heart labored with suffocation. Experience and a savage will kept his progress straight and steady as he rode the long miles. Badwater rarely gave warning. Suddenly, an hour past noon, it was there, a depression, a falsely salt-snowed sink in the blasted flats. At the bottom was a hole, bathtub size, filled with stagnant liquid.

Not far away was the flimsy and crazy shack built by some long-forgotten wanderer of the wasteland who'd had a sense of the fitness of things. Coming upon it was raising a landfall after a thirsting æon of becalmed navigation. Out of nothing, it was there.

The horse had stretched his endurance and was suffering. Marv had stayed in the saddle by the will of God. For an hour, directed only by instinct, he had drifted in a queer anesthesia. Then Badwater appeared and he cleared his tortured eyes. He stiffened as though stung by an electric current, jerked erect in his saddle and grabbed wildly for his booted rifle.

Standing in the lean-to of the shack were two horses.

Jeb and Hal Kress had come out of the door as Marv approached. Hal's gun was aimed at Marv and his finger was already tightening on the trigger.

Marv snatched his rifle free and jumped from the saddle as droning death whined and snarled savagely around his fast-moving body. Hal was pumping his weapon furiously. Miraculously his shots missed and Marv aimed his six-gun. His first shot cut through Hal's head, killing him as he stood. Others, as he began to shoot, tore flying splinters from the shack in back of Jeb's shoulders. Jeb howled, dropped his gun and dashed madly for the horses as Marv's gun clicked on an empty chamber. Slashing the horses free he sprawled crazily into the saddle of one and struck the far slope on a frantic run.

Dashing for his slowly drifting and side-stepping horse, Marv left his smoking rifle where it lay. He was tugging at his .44 as he hit the leather and took up the insane chase—insane because neither horseflesh nor human endurance could stand it for long.

JEB'S horse had had a small sip of water and a slight rest. Marv's gelding was the better animal, but near done. Amazingly, that impossible race continued for an hour, first at a headlong run, then at a drunken lope, a staggering trot, and finally at no more than a wavering and halting walk. And the hunter inched ever closer to the hunted and drew near enough at last to aim and shoot.

[*Turn page*]

Train for a Good Job Now that Will Also Be a Good Job in Peace-Time

H. C. LEWIS

Don't be caught napping. Prepare for a good essential job now that will still be a good job with a real future when the war is over. If you are not a trained man you may have to compete with millions of other untrained men. Get into a field that offers real opportunities in war times, peace-times—good-times and bad-times. Radio-Electronics trained men are needed today—they will be needed too when peace comes.

REAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE RADIO TRAINED MAN

Prepare for jobs as assembler, inspector and tester—Radio sales or service and installation work, electronics, television, sound work, aircraft-radio, auto-radio, etc. Many opportunities in the vast Radio-Electronics field.

LEARN BY DOING

We don't teach by book study. We train you on a great outlay of Radio, Television and Sound equipment—on scores of modern Radio Receivers, Television apparatus, Sound Reproduction equipment, etc. Whether or not you have had Radio experience you need Coyne all-around Radio-Electronics training. We give you—RIGHT HERE IN THE COYNE SHOPS IN CHICAGO—the actual practice and experience you'll need in this great field. And because we cut out all useless theory and only give that which is necessary you get a practical training in a few weeks. Right now I'm including extra training in Industrial Electronics at no extra cost. We also have facilities for physically disabled men. Write for details.

EARN WHILE LEARNING

If you need part-time work to help pay living expenses while at school, we will help you get it. After you graduate, life-time employment service will be available to you. Every Coyne graduate also receives a Life Membership, with free technical and business service and privilege of review at any time without additional tuition charge.

GET MY BIG NEW BOOK

It tells all about my big Chicago shops and my plans to help you get ahead. Packed with facts and pictures of students at work in my shops. Mail coupon for this Big New Book now! Coupon will also bring details on how I'll Finance Your Training . . . facts on how I help you "Earn-While-Learning" . . . information on FREE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE FOR LIFE . . . and other plans to help you. ACT NOW TO MAKE SURE YOU GET MY GENEROUS OFFER. Sending for this interesting free book can be your first big step to success. No obligation. No salesman will call. Mail the coupon today.

H. C. LEWIS, Pres., Radio-Electronics Div., COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 74-5K, Chicago 12, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis: Send me your Big Free Radio-Electronics Book and all the facts . . . also full details of your "Pay-after-Graduation" plan.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... ZONE.... STATE.....

Pays HOSPITAL BILLS for Whole Family

Costs 3c a Day for Adults
Only 1½c a Day for Children

It's here! The new Family Hospital and Surgical Expense Policy you need and want! One policy insures whole family—mother, father, children, anyone from 3 months to 65 years. No medical examination. Pays up to $510.00 hospital and surgical bills for EACH and EVERY person insured. Pays up to $100.00 doctor's fees for operations. Pays up to $50.00 for operating room, medicines, ambulance, etc. Covers sicknesses, accidents, operations, childbirth, female disorders, and many other disabilities not covered by other policies. You select your own doctor and hospital. This full-coverage Family Hospital and Surgical Policy issued DIRECT to you at special family rates by big, strong company with over $3,000,000.00 in assets. Investigate! SEND NO MONEY, but mail the coupon below quick for full details—sent FREE. No agent will call on you. Act today!

STERLING INSURANCE CO.
4602 Sterling Bldg., CHICAGO 11, ILL.

Send me your FREE INSPECTION Offer of LOW-COST Family Hospitalization Plan.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

TOOTHACHE? DUE TO CAVITY

QUICK, amazing relief with Dent's Tooth Gum or Dent's Tooth Drops! "Cavity toothache" frequently strikes at night. Be prepared. Get either package from your druggist today. Keep it handy. Follow easy directions on box. 25¢

DENT'S TOOTH GUM TOOTH DROPS

SIMPLE EARACHE? Get swift relief from pain due to superficial ear conditions—with Dent's Ear Drops. Follow easy directions. If your druggist does not have these products, better order today from C. S. Dent & Co., Cincinnati 14, Ohio.

DENT'S EAR DROPS 50¢

LAW STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 35 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance" NOW!
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 47-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

If Ruptured Try This Out

Modern Protection Provides Great Comfort and Holding Security

Without Torturous Truss Wearing

An "eye-opening" revelation in sensible and comfortable reducible rupture protection may be yours for the asking, without cost or obligation. Simply send name and address to William S. Rice, Inc., Dept. 34-L, Adams, N. Y., and full details of the new and different Rice Method will be sent you Free. Without hard flesh-gouging pads or tormenting pressure, here's a Support that has brought joy and comfort to thousands—by releasing them from Trusses with springs and straps that bind and cut. Designed to securely hold a rupture up and in where it belongs and yet give freedom of body and genuine comfort. For full information—write today!

Senses reeling in the agony of his effort for air, Marv saw to his astonishment that Jeb's horse lunged at the shot and then collapsed in a kicking heap. He was to learn that his slug had struck the animal's spine and shattered it, snuffing its life in seconds.

Marv was immediately the open target for the rifle Jeb snaked across his prone animal's back, and this time he rolled too late. A steel-jacketed slug nicked his collarbone and yanked him to earth. For a time his lights were out.

Like his boss, Marv had never figured Hal and Jeb Kress as badmen. Temptation or necessity, some tight jam they had fallen into, perhaps, had slid them across the line from hard-working punchers to payroll thieves. They had always seemed like decent men, though close-mouthed and secretive, and as much alike as two short, barrel-chested and bow-legged men could be.

Now, as Jeb Kress stood over Marv's still form and glared down he was a man from whose face all light of reason had fled. His black eyes were burning coals, his black stubble a ferocious mask over square-set and maddened features. Marv saw that Jeb had disarmed him and was on the verge of shooting him through the head. He made no move.

Jeb's breath came in laboring and whistling gasps. His crazy eyes glared down into Marv's.

"So yuh're alive, huh, and awake?" he snarled.

Marv made no move nor effort to answer.

"Plumb paralyzed, I reckon," Jeb's voice rose in a cackling, heat-crazed laugh. "I figured to shoot yuh, but I got a better idea now. I'll take yore shoes, yore canteen and yore horse. I'll give yuh my horse, my dead one, and yuh can ride him in if yuh want. Or yuh can walk in bare feet on this sand and as yuh die slowly yuh can think how pleasantly and quickly my brother died!"

There was nothing Marv could do. Only a miracle kept Jeb's twitching finger from sending a slug crashing through his head. So he lay taut and still and watched frantically for the opening that never came as Jeb ripped off his boots with one hand, then staggered drunkenly away and caught up Marv's horse.

Jeb lurched up into the saddle,

thonged the boots together and hung them there, watching Marv craftily all the time from crazily cunning eyes. He patted Marv's canteen, still carrying half its water, with a loving hand.

"Yore welcome to everything I own excepting just what I'm carrying," said Jeb. "My horse and saddle, my empty canteen—everything. I'm big-hearted."

Jeb seemed to think that enormously funny and howled his laughter. Still laughing, he waved his hand airily and rode away, headed back toward Badwater. Though Marv's horse stumbled as he went, in his fighting heart was still the strength to carry his new burden.

It was maybe a half-dozen miles back to Badwater. Plainly, in his crazy cunning, Jeb meant to return there and wait out what remained of the day, perhaps bury his brother and catch up the horse he had slashed free. It must be the saddle-bags of that loose horse that held the payroll money. At dark, Jeb would make the long dash which would deliver him from this sun-death trap.

Six miles to Badwater! For the moment, the impact of what that meant to him shriveled Marv's soul in despair. Six miles, barefooted in unbearable heat, and without a drop of water—

It was near dusk at the waterhole. Possibly, only just possibly, there was a drop of a degree in the awful heat of this terrible day. As the dark drew in slowly, creeping as though hesitant to occupy a land so wholly the sun's, a grotesque figure appeared on the lip of the sink across from the shack and fell, rather than walked, in a forward-sagging shamble down the slope. It was a man, but he had little resemblance to a human being in the weird way he moved, flung his arms about and mouthed soundlessly with what had once been lips.

The darkness held back and watched. There was no breath of air, and even the heat was motionless.

He approached the shack without sound and stumbled his way to the door. He leaned there, arms outspread to clutch the frames, and his head sagged as he looked in. The interior must have been misty and dim, a blurred picture for his bleary eyes.

Ralph Grew was standing with his burly back against a wall, his arms outspread. His flinty gray eyes were fixed

[*Turn page*]

Win WAR BONDS

A GRAND TOTAL OF

$1,000.00

IN PRIZES FOR YOUR IDEAS

Midwest Radio Corporation—since 1920, famous for fine radios, and their factory-to-you selling plan with savings up to 50%—looks to the post-war future. To build the kind of radio you want, they ask you now to submit a letter on the subject: "What I Want In My Post-War Radio." For the 11 best letters, Midwest will give $1,000.00 in War Bonds. Letters must not exceed 200 words and you may send as many entries as you wish. Letters will be judged on the practical value of the ideas contained therein and the decision of the judges will be final. In case of ties, duplicate prizes will be awarded. All entries must be postmarked not later than midnight December 31, 1944. Contest is open to all except employees of Midwest Radio Corporation, their advertising agency, and members of their families. Winners will be notified on January 31, 1945. Prizes will be awarded as follows:

First Prize .....$500 in War Bonds
Second Prize .....$200 in War Bonds
Third Prize .....$100 in War Bonds
and eight prizes of a $25 War Bond each.

Send your entry to Contest Editor at the address shown below.

MIDWEST RADIO

MIDWEST RADIO CORP.
Dept. 62B, Cincinnati 2, O.

SONGWRITERS

Place your songs with us. Melodies supplied WITHOUT CHARGE by well known Hollywood composers. We record your song and make it presentable to the publishers. Lead sheets and records furnished. Send your song material for free examination. Write for details.

CINEMA SONG CO. DEPT. 1-P P. O. BOX 670
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF.

PRAYER

Is a Tremendous Mighty Power! Are you facing difficult **Problems? Poor Health? Money Troubles? Love or Family Troubles?** Are you **Worried** about some one dear to you? Do you ever get **Lonely—Unhappy—Discouraged?** Would you like to have more **Happiness, Success** and "**Good Fortune**" in Life?

If you do have any of these Problems, or others like them, dear friends, then here is wonderful **NEWS—NEWS** of a remarkable **NEW WAY of PRAYER** that is helping thousands of other men and women to glorious **NEW** happiness and joy! Whether you have always believed in **PRAYER** or not, this remarkable **NEW WAY** may bring a whole **NEW** world of happiness and joy to you—and very, very quickly, too!

So don't wait, dear friend, don't let another minute go by! If you are troubled, worried or unhappy **IN ANY WAY**—we invite you to clip this **Message** now and mail with 3c stamp for **FULL INFORMATION** about this remarkable **NEW WAY of PRAYER** that is helping so many, many others and which may just as certainly and quickly help **YOU!**

You will surely bless this day—so please don't delay! Just clip this **Message** now and mail with your name, address and 3c stamp to **LIFE-STUDY FELLOWSHIP**, Box 3511, Norcton, Conn. This wonderful **NEW Message of PRAYER and FAITH** will be on the way to help you by return mail.

GUM GRIPPER

TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH

OR NO COST

Amazing NEW Plastic Reliner

LASTS FROM 4 to 6 MONTHS

NOW—in a jiffy—you can make loose, slipping dental plates fit snug and comfortable. Eat, talk in comfort, laugh freely—for "Gum Gripper" enables you to enjoy that feeling of almost having your own teeth again!

• APPLY IT YOURSELF—AT HOME

"GUM GRIPPER" amazing plastic Reliner tightens dental plates quickly, makes them hold firmly and fit like new! Just squeeze from tube, spread evenly, put plate in mouth, wear it while "Gum Gripper" sets in few minutes. No heating necessary.

• USE ON ANY DENTAL PLATE

"Gum Gripper" will not harm denture or irritate gums. Sanitary, odorless. Keeps mouth sweet and clean, prevents sore spots. Application of plastic "Gum Gripper" is guaranteed to last 4 to 6 months—or no cost. Can be scrubbed or washed. Rev. A. J. Wigley, Pittsburgh, Pa., writes: "Best material I ever used. I have not relined my lower teeth for 2 months."

"Best I've Ever Used"

SEND NO MONEY— Order a tube today—it's only $1.00. Fill out and mail coupon below. You'll be delighted! Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.

FREE Generous size package Dental Plate cleaner included free of extra cost. Cleanses dental plates without brushing. Will not harm denture.

GUM GRIPPER 127 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 50-C, CHICAGO

GUM GRIPPER, Dept. 50-C
127 N. Dearborn St., Chicago 2, Ill.

Send me a tube of "Gum Gripper." You guarantee it to satisfy—or it will not cost me a penny.

☐ I will deposit $1.00 plus postage with postman when package arrives.

☐ Enclosed is $1.00—You pay postage.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

WILLIAM W. LORD

"SUPERMIND"

WORLD'S GREATEST PSYCHIC

THREE PERSONAL QUESTIONS

answered confidentially upon receipt of letter in your handwriting and one dollar. Give birthdate.

LORD 20 W. Jackson Dept. R-114 Chicago 4, Ill.

ASTHMA

WRITE FOR FREE TRIAL OFFER!

If you suffer from Bronchial Asthma Paroxysms, from coughs, gasping wheezing—write quick for daring Free Trial Offer. Inquiries from so-called "hopeless" cases especially invited.

NACOR, 426-P State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

in an immoveable and tense stare watching for any chance, any flicker of an instant in which he could slash a hand down to the big six-gun on his powerful thigh. Across the room from him, pointing a gun at Grew, laughing insanely, was Jeb Kress crazily drawing out the agony before he shot the big man.

An eerie sound, more like the bark of an animal than anything else, burst from the burnt lips of Marv Taylor standing in the door. Unexpected, it had the effect of a powder explosion.

Jeb whirled unwarily to face the door, gun leaping. Grew's huge right hand flashed down and up. There was the roar of two guns, one a split ahead of the other—and Grew's was first.

Marv staggered into the room, unhit. Jeb was dead and barely twitching, on the floor. For a long moment, Marv and his boss stared at each other and Grew's eyes dilated with pity and horror.

"What that fiend did to yuh, Marv!" he said with awe. "I walked in on him here. He was lying on his face on the floor, his gun beneath him. I figured he was unconscious or dead and when I bent over him he rolled and flipped up his gun. He had me. Lord, what he did to yuh, Marv! He taunted me with it, said yuh'd never come out alive. God forgive me, it was all my fault!"

Marv's eyes were vague. His lips twitched in what might have been a smile. His breathing came painfully.

"He said I could ride his dead horse," he whispered. "I reckon that's what I done. I cut green hide from his back and wrapped it around my feet. I sucked on chunks of the raw, wet meat. That horse brought me in. Yeah, seemed like I was riding him!"

Without warning, Marv's eyes closed and he fell face forward. Grew caught him and stretched him out tenderly. As gently as a woman he washed the cowboy's poor burned face.

Then he took an oath. By heaven, this was a man! On the big G-Square a boy could go far. And Ralph Grew would see that this one did.

■

Coming Next Issue

●

WESTWARD ROLL THE WAGONS

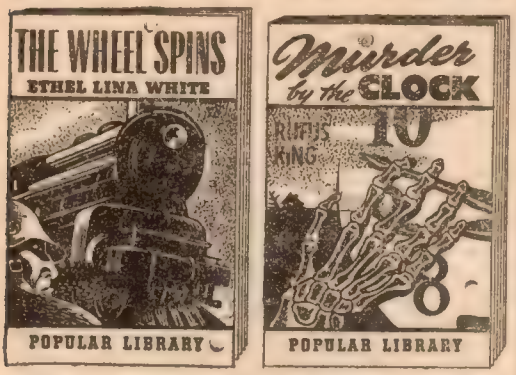
A Buffalo Billy Bates Story

By SCOTT CARLETON

Mystery Fans!

Here's Your Chance to Obtain World-Famous Best Sellers

NOW ONLY 25¢ EACH AT ALL STANDS



Send for These POPULAR LIBRARY Hits

No. 38: THE DARK SHIPS, by Hulbert Footner. Four deserted vessels at Absalom's Point become the center of an intense search for a killer! A mystery packed with suspense.
No. 37: MOTHER FINDS A BODY, by Gypsy Rose Lee. Murder at a trailer camp. A fascinating backstage view of burlesque plus an absorbing and entertaining mystery.
No. 36: DEATH AND THE MAIDEN, by Q. Patrick. The violent death of Grace Hough brings chaos to the Wentworth College campus.
No. 35: THE MYSTERY OF HUNTING'S END, by Mignon G. Eberhart. A dramatic crime novel featuring Nurse Sarah Keate.
No. 34: MR. PINKERTON AT THE OLD ANGEL, by David Frome. Murder stalks an old inn in this exciting mystery.
No. 33: McKEE OF CENTRE STREET, by Helen Reilly. A dancer's death plunges Inspector McKee into a baffling case.
No. 32: THE WHEEL SPINS, by Ethel Lina White. The mystery on which the famous movie, "The Lady Vanishes, was based.
No. 31: MURDER BY THE CLOCK, by Rufus King. A four star Lieutenant Valcour mystery.
No. 30: THERE'S TROUBLE BREWING, by Nicholas Blake. A tense mystery of amazing murder featuring Nigel Strangeways.
No. 29: WEEK-END WITH DEATH, by Patricia Wentworth. Sarah Marlowe discovers a ticket to doom in her handbag. A real baffler.

If your dealer cannot supply you, use coupon below

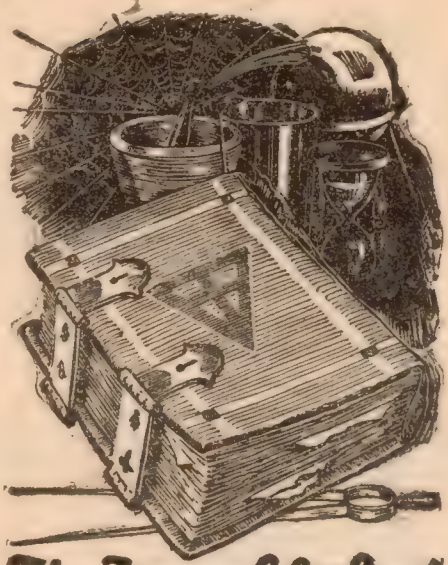
POPULAR LIBRARY, 10 E. 40th St., New York 16, N. Y.
Please send me the mystery novels I have checked by number. I am enclosing 30c. (which includes postage and handling) for each book ordered.

38 ☐ 37 ☐ 36 ☐ 35 ☐ 34 ☐
33 ☐ 32 ☐ 31 ☐ 30 ☐ 29 ☐

Name .....
Address .....
City ..... *State* .....

PW-11

SECRETS ENTRUSTED TO A FEW



The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that can not be generally told—*things you ought to know.* Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power* and *accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of *the hidden processes of man's mind,* and *the mastery of life's problems.* Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

THIS FREE BOOK

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization), an age-old brotherhood of learning, have preserved this secret wisdom in their archives for centuries. *They now invite you to share the practical helpfulness of their teachings.* Write today for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." Within its pages may lie a new life of opportunity for you. Address Scribe A. H. B.

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
San Jose California, U.S.A.

STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

30 Years In Business

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton Sta., St. Louis, Mo.

Getting Up Nights Makes Many Feel Old

Do you feel older than you are or suffer from Getting Up Nights, Backache, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Swollen Ankles, Rheumatic Pains, Burning, scanty or frequent passages? If so, remember that your Kidneys are vital to your health and that these symptoms may be due to non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles—in such cases **Cystex** (a physician's prescription) usually gives prompt and joyous relief by helping the Kidneys flush out poisonous excess acids and wastes. Get **Cystex** from your druggist today. Take it exactly as directed and see the results in your own particular case. Under our guarantee unless completely satisfied you simply return the empty package and get your money back. So get **Cystex** today. Three guaranteed sizes: **Only 35c, 75c, $1.50** at your druggist.

Cystex
Helps Flush Kidneys

RATIONED MOTORISTS

Now Get *EXTRA*
GASOLINE MILEAGE

Now you can get up to **30%** extra gasoline mileage with a Vacu-matic on your car. Quicker pick-up, smoother running, added power and precious gasoline savings guaranteed.

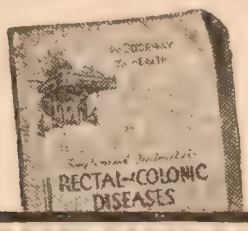
Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* Operates on the Supercharge principle. Saves gas. Automatically provides a better gas mixture. Guaranteed to give up to **30%** extra gas mileage, more power and better performance.

FITS ALL CARS
Constructed of six parts, fused into a single unit. *Adjusted and sealed at the factory.* Very quickly installed by anyone.

AGENTS TRIAL OFFER
Every car, truck, tractor a prospect. Send name address on postcard for big money making offer and how you get yours for introducing.

Vacu-matic Co., 7617-976 W. State St., Wauwatosa 13, Wis.



YOUR HEALTH
Requires Constant Vigilance

Neglected chronic ailments in time may undermine health. This is especially true of rectal, stomach and colon conditions, on which informative literature will be sent on your request.

THORNTON & MINOR CLINIC
Suite 1156, 926 McGee
Kansas City 6, Missouri

SONG POEMS WANTED

We want song poems and lyrics on all subjects. We offer the services of a noted Hollywood motion picture composer and arranger. Send your poem today for our consideration and liberal offer.
HOLLYWOOD MELODIES, P. O. Box 2168B, Hollywood 28, Calif.

THE HOME CORRAL
(Continued from page 8)

shirt and was poking around for a spot to stretch out and take a sunbath. Close beside the light shadow of a creosote bush I saw an all right spot and was about to fling myself onto the warm, inviting sand when I saw bellymarks of a snake.

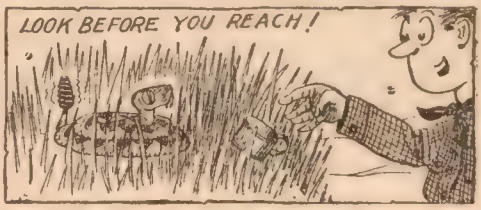
I stood stockstill and scanned the ground all around me. It was quite a spell before I saw something. I was about to go forward when suddenly I froze to my tracks. There on the edge of the creosote shadow, no more'n two steps in front of me was—

A sidewinder?

No, *two* coiled sidewinders!

I shot three times. I now have the rattles of those two little horned vipers.

That was typical sidewinder behavior. Neither one rattled. They're small and almost invisible on desert sand, and seem to



rely on that for protection. Which is an unpleasant characteristic, together with the fact that the sidewinder's miniature rattles make only a tiny whirr which can't always be heard with a desert wind playing tunes in your ears.

A favorite stunt of the sidewinder is to coil in a hooftrack and sometimes half-bury himself in loose, fine sand to protect himself from the direct rays of the sun, which he cannot endure for very long.

Keep Old Glory Flying!

BUY
UNITED STATES
WAR SAVINGS

BONDS and STAMPS

Every Payday!

It's the patented filter with its 66 mesh-screen baffles, that whirlcools the smoke —retains flakes and slugs—absorbs moisture—minimizes raw mouth and tongue bite. When filter is discolored, it has done its job. Discard it and put in a fresh one—costs only ONE CENT. Enjoy the benefits of Frank Medico Pipe, Cigarette and Cigar Holders.

REMOVABLE FILTER IS THE HEART OF

MEDICO FILTERED SMOKING

$1 WITH BOX OF FILTERS FREE!

X-RAY VIEW
GENUINE FILTERS FOR MEDICO PACKED ONLY IN THIS RED & BLACK BOX
ABSORBENT FILTERS for Frank MEDICO
PATD. BAFFLE SCREEN INTERIOR WITH "CELLOPHANE" EXTERIOR

Amazingly few desert dwellers are bitten, even when they habitually bed down on open ground, such as prospectors do—and more lately, soldiers. Right recent I asked some soldiers on desert maneuvers if they found many snakes as they slept out in foxholes and such.

"Yessir, any number of 'em," calmly replied a G.I.

"Anybody get fanged?"

"Not that I know of. Heck, mister, we wouldn't know it if we did! We've got punctured so many times with serums that a little ol' rattlesnake bite wouldn't even faze us!"

Snake Country

I've seen railroad track hands wearing tin stovepipe leggins in mid-Oregon. There's snake country for you, along the lower Deschutes. It's lava country and you can't see

where you're stepping. No better trout fishing anywhere, but tender-shanked anglers don't mess around there much.

Do you know that rattlesnakes, all snakes for that matter, can swim? I know of one actual case where a boatload of Boy Scouts was on a lake. They saw a V of ripples and spotted a rattler swimming for them. It reached the boatside and started to crawl over the gunwhales. One of the Scouts lammed it in half with an oar. [*Turn page*]

SONG POEMS WANTED
TO BE SET TO MUSIC
Free Examination. Send Your Poems to
J. CHAS. McNEIL, MASTER OF MUSIC
510 TF So. Alexandria Los Angeles 5, Calif.

Try Anti-Gray Hair Vitamins

Plus Wheat Germ Oil (E) Vitamins
ON THIS MONEY BACK OFFER

RESTORING COLOR TO GRAY HAIR WITHOUT DYES IS SCIENCE'S LATEST MIRACLE

If your hair is gray, graying, streaked, faded or off-color, modern science offers new hope without dyeing. A lack of certain vitamins in your daily diet can cause hair to turn gray. Improve your diet, get extra supplies of these "anti-gray hair" vitamins by simply taking the original 2-way Panate Vitamin treatment. You too may be amazed and delighted to see the gray spread stopped, restoration of normal natural original color to the hair at roots, temples, parting, a great improvement in your hair beauty. You can now test Panates yourself on an iron clad guarantee that leaves no room for doubt. PANATES is different—it not only contains a powerful supply of "Anti-Gray Hair" Vitamins but "staff-of-life" Vitamin (E) Wheat Germ Oil as well. Panates is not a hair dye. You have nothing to fear . . . no mess, no fuss. You can test safe, healthful Panates whether you now dye your hair or not, because Panates Vitamins work from within to check gray spread and literally feed natural color back into the hair roots.

When the blood does not provide the proper elements, the tiny laboratory that manufactures color shuts down and the hair grows gray. Perhaps you may need the vitamins in Panates. Make this test today.

SEND FOR THIS INTRODUCTORY TRIAL OFFER TODAY!

The 30 day trial of the regular $4.79 (90 day) Panates double action Vitamins is only $1.79 if you act at once! SEND NO MONEY, pay postman plus C.O.D. postage on arrival on guarantee of full satisfaction or money back. Send $1.79 and we pay all postage. Or, if you want more of the amazing Panates Anti-Gray Hair Vitamin story, write for FREE Valuable Booklet, "Vitamins and Gray Hair." No cost, no obligation. Whatever you send for put your letter or postcard in the mail today while Special Offer is available. Who knows perhaps the 2 vitamins in Panates may be the wonderful easy-way answer to your hair color worries!

Not in stores. Write

PANATE CO. Dept. M-311, 310 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago 4, Ill.

DRAW for MONEY

Be An ARTIST!

PREPARE TODAY FOR THE FUTURE THAT LIES AHEAD

Trained Artists Are Capable of Earning $30 - $50 - $75 A WEEK

Use your spare time to prepare for a profitable Art Career! Start training at home, now! It's pleasant and interesting to study Art the W. S. A. way. COMMERCIAL ART, DESIGNING, CARTOONING—all in ONE complete course. No previous Art experience necessary—we teach you step-by-step by our practical home study method well-known since 1914. *Write today for information in FREE BOOK,* "ART FOR PLEASURE AND PROFIT"—tells all about our course, material furnished, service—and commercial opportunities for you in Art. State age.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART, Studio 6611K, 1115-15th St., N.W., Washington 5, D.C.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-858, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

GET RID OF **GRAY HAIR**

or your money back

Send no money. Send us your name and address. We will send bottle of Beutalure, scientific preparation for coloring gray hair, used like hair tonic. If satisfied with improvement after 3 weeks, send us $1.80 (includes tax) in full payment. If not satisfied, return unused portion of Beutalure at our expense.

BEUTALURE, Inc. 14 Ashley Pl., Dept. T-16 Wilmington, Delaware

RHEUMATISM

ARTHRITIS - NEURITIS

Get Mendenhall's Number 40 from your druggist or by mail postpaid for $1.25. Money back if first bottle fails to satisfy.

J. C. MENDENHALL MEDICINE CO.
Dept. 70, Evansville, Indiana

POEMS WANTED

To be set to music. Send your song poem today for free examination by nationally famous hit composer who has had over 325 songs published. Our new 6 step plan is most liberal and complete ever offered. Write today for free booklet.

SCREENLAND RECORDERS
DEPT. C HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

***Get into the* BAKING BUSINESS**

Bakers make good money! Now 7th Industry in wages! Nearly depression-proof. New home study Baking Course qualifies you. Common school education sufficient. If you're ambitious, write for FREE BOOK, "Opportunities in Baking."
National Baking School, 1315 Michigan, Dept. 1808, Chicago 5

PILES Try Page's Palliative PILE PREPARATIONS

If you are troubled with itching, bleeding or protruding piles, write for a FREE sample of Page's Palliative Pile Preparations and you may bless the day you read this. Don't wait. WRITE TODAY!

E. R. PAGE CO., Dept. 421-X4, Marshall, Mich.
IN CANADA, DEPT. 421-X4, TORONTO, ONT.

Rattlers often make life interesting in haying season on Western ranches. Many a rancher can tell you of seeing a fat diamond-back dangling as he lifted a forkful of hay to load it onto the wagon. One time I came onto a hay-baling outfit that had stopped work and was carrying on a worried searching. I made inquiry and was told that the man feeding the baler had pitched a snake into the baler hopper. It was natural to suppose that the snake had got himself baled up. But in which bale? And could it get out? Also when, and in what kind of mood?

The baling outfit was still pondering their problem when I left.

When You Find 'Em

A lot of people ask me, "Just where can I expect to find snakes?" The answer is, the very last place you'd expect. I've covered literally thousands of miles of desert, mountain and prairie where coiled death might spring from any bush; then came on a reptile in my most unsnake-conscious moment. As did a friend of mine who thought he heard a slow leak in his rear right tire.

He got down on hands and knees and held his head close, listening. He found himself staring sociably, eye to eye, with a foot-long sidewinder. Its tiny rattles sounded almost exactly like a slow, hissing leak in a tire.

One of the few cases of snake bite that happened within my own personal observation happened to a collector for a natural history museum. He snared a fine specimen of *crotalus mitchellii,* the mottled desert rattler. (Not a sidewinder but a big snake, only one of the kind which lacks the familiar diamond-back markings.)

He put the snake in a box that had wire mesh at one end. Later, in picking up the box he got careless. Whang! He dropped box and snake. A driblet of blood grew on the end of his index finger.

The first thing he thought of was a safety razor blade and he had one handy. He neatly pared off an oblique slice of finger end and never suffered the slightest ill effect, except for a cut finger that healed normally.

Now about another friend who had a morbid fear of snakes. He joined me one fall and I took him on a deerhunt over ground I'd covered plenty without ever seeing a snake.

In one day my friend stumbled onto two of 'em and blasted them with his rifle, then high-tailed out of those parts. Which was just as well, because he'd likely scared all the bucks from that part of the country anyhow.

A kinsman of mine squatted to cut the rattles off a snake he'd just killed. At touch of the knifeblade, the dead snake whipped back by reflex action, the crushed bloody head spatting against the back of my kinsman's hand. Just by luck the fangs didn't penetrate.

A Good Method

I was with a man one day who amazed me by leaping onto a rattler crossing a dusty road and crushing it under his bootheels.

"That," he said blithely, "is the way I always kill 'em."

A real good method, maybe, when it's cool and the snake is loggy. But not so good when snakes are limber and lightning-fast, as in the old buckaroo method of snatching 'em by the

tail and crackin' 'em like a whip.

I tried it, snapping the head off a coral snake. But I don't advise you to exterminate your snakes thataway, hombres and hombresses. Lest on some bright summer day you find one wrapped around your neck.

I knew another man who watched a big rattler crawl across his toes and he didn't make a budge to molest it.

"Man is the only critter that kills wantonly just to make more room for himself," he explained to me. "And the world's outstanding example of such a man is—Adolf Hitler."

I feel a good bit thataway myownself! Well, *adios*, folks, till next time.

—OLD DOC TRAIL.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

YOUR old friend W. C. Tuttle is back with a novel you can get your teeth into—SIX-GUNS AND A HUNCH—told as only Tuttle can tell a story, with all its rich Western flavor and color.

Rusty Beale, hero of SIX-GUNS AND A HUNCH, didn't have a Chinaman's chance to be elected sheriff, he said so himself. But the night before election, Sheriff Tom Hefner was murdered and Rusty Beale was pitchforked right into the job. He inherited a coroner's inquest and a murder mystery.

For a two-bit rancher with four calves and a partner named Cactus who shuddered at the sight of a lawman's badge, Rusty found himself flying in high company. The forces that had murdered Sheriff Hefner thought no more kindly of Rusty Beale, and a conspiracy to eliminate him was under way before he had even dusted off the sheriff's chair to sit down.

Headwork and gunplay mark Rusty's path in the long cleaning up—a path you'll ride with enjoyment. Action and laughs are the Tuttle trademark and there's a plenty of both

[*Turn page*]

America's Best Dime's Worth of Picture Entertainment

Now on Sale at All Stands

HOSPITAL and DOCTOR BILLS PAID!

HOSPITALIZATION PLAN

3¢ costs about A DAY

POLICY PAYS
Hospital and Doctor Bills up to:
$6.00 Each Day $1080.00
HOSPITAL
Maximum Benefit for Room, Board, General Nursing for each insured adult. Includes up to 90 days per year for Accident and up to 90 days per year for Sickness.
$25 Each Week
LOSS of TIME $300
From work by Accident up to 12 weeks.
DOCTOR EXPENSES $135.00
Maximum benefit for additional Medical or Surgical care while in Hospital due to injuries.
$1000.00
Accidental Loss of Life, Limbs or Entire Sight
Many other liberal benefits. All as plainly stated in Policy.

Don't go into debt when Sickness or Accident strikes. Be prepared—protect yourself NOW! This dependable Hospital and Doctor Expense Policy PAYS YOUR BILLS FROM THE VERY FIRST DAY of Hospitalization, exactly as provided. Also included are additional benefits for LOSS of TIME from work while in hospital, due to accident disability. Any recognized Hospital and any Doctor may be selected. Policy issued to Individual or Family. No red tape—no medical examination—no agents. Write today—NOW!

George Rogers Clark Casualty Co., Rockford, Ill. Dept. 4062

MAIL COUPON NOW!

George Rogers Clark Casualty Co. Dept. 4062
Rockford, Illinois

Please rush FREE information about Hospital and Doctor's Expense Policy.

Name .....

Address .....

City & State.....

PERSONAL STATIONERY!

Your Name & Address Elegantly Printed on 40 Sheets Antique Bond & 20 Matching Envelopes only 25c! Or for $1.00 you get one set free of extra charge—or 5 wonderful sets in all! Business or personal style. Send one name or five different names on $1.00 order. Money back guarantee. Order now! Supply limited.
Western Stationery Co., Dept. 207-M, Topeka, Kan.

25¢

POEMS WANTED

For Musical Setting

Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject. DON'T DELAY—Send us your Original Poem at once—for immediate examination and FREE RHYMING DICTIONARY.

RICHARD BROTHERS 74 WOODS BUILDING CHICAGO, ILL.

MAGIC LIQUID MAKES

PHOTOS APPEAR

On Scarfs, Ties, Stationery, Etc.

Reproduce any snapshot on *cloth, leather, wood, paper*. Simply apply liquid. Like magic photo appears within 2 minutes in broad daylight. Harmless to negative. Won't wash off. Full colors included. Complete kit for 100 photos only $1.29. Send no money, just name. Pay postman $1.29 plus few cents postage on delivery. Or send cash with order and get postpaid. (Canada $1.50 money order only.) Order today.
L & M Mfg. Co., Dept. 352, 229 W. Breckenridge, Louisville 3, Ky.

Acid Indigestion

Relieved in 5 minutes or double your money back

When excess stomach acid causes painful, suffocating gas, sour stomach and heartburn, doctors usually prescribe the fastest-acting medicines known for symptomatic relief—medicines like those in Bell-ans Tablets. No laxative. Bell-ans brings comfort in a jiffy or double your money back on return of bottle to us. 25¢ everywhere.

Latest Styles
EYE GLASSES
ORDER BY MAIL
16 DAYS TRIAL
AS LOW AS $1.89 PAIR

MONEY BACK Guarantee
Your money refunded if not entirely satisfied with glasses.

Save money by ordering glasses in your own home. Many handsome new styles. Low Prices.

SEND NO MONEY

Just write for FREE Catalog. Take advantage of big money savings. We repair broken glasses. Fill prescription.

MODERN STYLE SPECTACLES, Inc.
53 W. Jackson Blvd., Dept. M-21, Chicago, Ill.

EXTRA MONEY FOR YOU WITH LEAF WORK AND SPORT GARMENTS!

Act as Local Dealer for Leaf Union Made Work Garments and Sportswear. Pleasant work. Experience unnecessary. Great demand daily from millions of war workers. We supply everything required. Write at once for Free Outfit LEAF GARMENT CO., 1213-19 Van Buren St., Dept. 58, Chicago, Ill.

TAKE OFF UGLY FAT

12 TO 15 LBS. A MONTH
Safely . . . Pleasantly
NO REDUCING DRUGS

It isn't as difficult as it sounds. If you follow the simple directions given here you'll find it easy, pleasant and safe to lose as much as 12 to 15 pounds of ugly fat this very month. Ask your own doctor. You don't go on strict, harmful diets — in fact you EAT EVERYTHING. Here's what you do:

1. **Eat your regular meals but avoid eating between meals and over-eating.**
2. **Don't cut out starchy foods or sweets — JUST CUT DOWN ON THEM.**
3. **Be sure you get enough of a certain essential vitamin and minerals while reducing — take 2 Bee-Fit Tablets after each meal.**

They are ABSOLUTELY SAFE and help you feel fit while losing those unwanted pounds and inches. Try the Bee-Fit Way for 10 days. You'll shout for joy at the improvement in your figure. SEND NO MONEY. Just name and address. When postman brings package pay him $1 plus 27c postage. If you send $1 with order, we pay postal charges—you save 27c. (Economy Size, containing 3 times as much, $2.50 — you save 50c.) Order today. Dept. TG. BEE-FIT VITAMIN CO., C, 152 W. 42nd St., N. Y. 18, N. Y.

BE A *Nurse*

MAKE $25-$35 A WEEK

You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. Thousands of graduates. 45th yr. One graduate has charge of 10-bed hospital. Another saved $400 while learning. Equipment included. Men, women 18 to 60. High School not required. Easy tuition payments. Write today.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 4210, 100 East Ohio Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send free booklet and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name .....
City ..... State..... Age.....

in this big novel, our prize package for the next issue!

Also on the bill is a Painted Post novelet: T-BAR-T TROUBLE, by Tom Gunn, starring Sheriff Blue Steele and his effervescent deputy, Shorty Watts.

Judge Bertram, solid citizen of Painted Post, was puffed up like a bullfrog about his cattle being rustled and yelling for Steele and Watts to do something about it. The Painted Post lawmen started out to do something and ran into the scariest thing they had ever seen —ghostly lights flickering on a mountainside, with no human in sight.

Ghost lights and rustlers were a double dose of trouble for the Painted Post lawmen, punctuated by the bark of guns and the scream of bullets. Steele knew his way around, ghosts or rustlers, but the real kick in the story is the surprising debut of Dictionary Smith as a hero. You'll get a bang out of it!

Another grand novelet in this issue is TRAIL DRIVE, by Chuck Martin, a story of courage and flaming guns on the long cattle trail from Texas to Dodge City.

John Seater, prosperous and progressive rancher of Tonto Creek, Texas, knew better than to try and halt the mighty flow of cattle northward through his range. But he also knew that the longhorns were crawling with ticks—ticks that brought the Texas fever to his own herds. So he fenced a narrow passageway for them to pass through and in this passageway he built sheep dip tanks. Every cow that passed through Bobbed Wire Alley, as it was promptly named, went into and through the vile smelling sheep dip which killed the fever breeding tick.

But Ranse Haldo, tough trail drover from Nagadoches, hated barbed wire and hated sheep dip and swore he'd cut the wire as he had done the year before. He brought up twenty hungry gun wolves on fighting pay, primed for war. Old John Seater met him at the bank of the Tonto and war was declared on the spot. Bob Wire Alley or the free range!

TRAIL DRIVE is one of the most colorful and gripping westerns you've ever read. It packs a solid .45 calibre punch all the way.

OLD DOC TRAIL
POPULAR WESTERN
10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y.

Dear Doc: I'm plumb anxious t' be a member o' th' POPULAR WESTERN CLUB. Here's who I am:

Name .....
Address .....
State ..... Age.....
Occupation .....
Ambition .....

I am enclosing a stamped self-addressed envelope. Send me a membership card.

NOTE: If you're headin' West an' have questions for Old Doc Trail tuh answer, enclose letter with this coupon. 11-44

And it's only one of the many entertaining yarns waiting for you in our next number!

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

LOOKING over the mailbag this trip, we find many swell letters and we only wish we could print them all.

If you want to know something about the magazine or the West, or have a suggestion to make, by all means write in to us and we'll see if we can't help. For example, here's a reader with a genuine question:

Why can't we have more funny stories in POPULAR WESTERN? I like the serious action stories, but I like the funny ones, too. The old-time cowboy was always playing jokes and tricks and his conversation was funny, too. This kind of story would be just as true to life as the shooting kind, and we could use more of them. How about it?—*Donald Spokane, Birmingham, Ala.*

The editor agrees with you a hundred percent, Don. Humor was as much a characteristic of the cowboy as his chaps and boots and these men joked even when going into danger. We have printed many fine humorous stories in POPULAR WESTERN and we'll go on printing them as we get them.

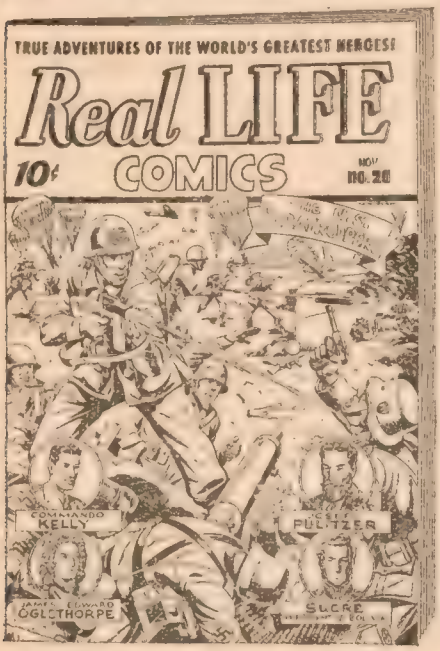
From a gal way down East:

Ever since I was a little girl I have wanted to go west and be a cowgirl. Do you think I can? What would be the best part of the West to go to?—*Millie Borden, Freeport, Me.*

Well, Millie, that's a tough one to answer. If you mean what I think you mean, I don't quite see how you can go out West and get a job as a cowgirl because so far as I know, the ranches aren't hiring girls to punch cows,

[*Turn page*]

Approved by Parents and Teachers



Now on Sale **10c** *At All Stands*

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"

There's a Thrill in Bringing a Crook to Justice Through Scientific

CRIME DETECTION

I have taught thousands of men and women this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let me teach you, too, in your own home. Prepare yourself in your leisure time to fill a responsible, steady, well-paid position in a very short time and at very small cost. What others have done, you too, can do.

53% of All American Identification Bureaus

Be A FINGER PRINT Expert

Employ students or graduates of I.A.S. This fascinating work is easy to learn and the training is inexpensive. You, too, can fit yourself to fill a responsible crime detection job with good pay and steady employment. But don't delay—get the details now. Let me show you how easily and completely I can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time, in your own home. You may pay as you learn. Write today for free Crime Book.

FREE! "THE BLUE BOOK OF CRIME!" It's a thriller. Tells about some of the most interesting crimes ever perpetrated and how they were solved through the very methods taught by I.A.S. Send now—be sure to state age.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
Dept. 7968, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago 40, Illinois

Protect Entire Family for $1 a Month

Certificate Paying Benefits up to $1,000.00, **Sent for FREE Inspection** **FREE**

Covers accidental or natural death. No medical examination. Age limits 2 to 75 years. SEND NO MONEY—just your name and address. No obligation. No salesman will call. Postcard will do. **Atlas Mutual Benefit Ass'n. Dept. 19-M5, Wilmington, Delaware.**

Do You Want LONGER HAIR

Just try this system on your hair 7 days and see if you are really enjoying the pleasure of **attractive** hair that so often captures love and romance.

HAIR MAY GET LONGER when scalp and hair conditions are normal and the dry, brittle, breaking off hair can be retarded, it has a chance to get longer and much more beautiful. **Just try the JUELENE SYSTEM** 7 days, let your mirror prove results. Send $1.00. (If C. O. D. postage extra). Fully guaranteed. Money back if you're not delighted.

JUEL CO., 1930 Irving Park Rd., Dept. A635, Chicago 13, Ill.

MATCHED BRIDAL PAIR

$5.95 EACH OR BOTH FOR $9.95

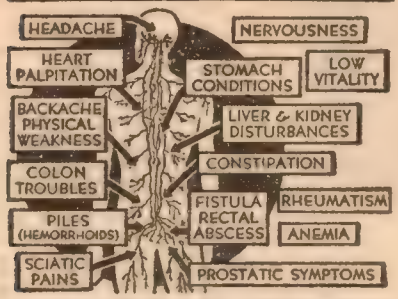
GENUINE

DIAMOND RINGS

Just to get acquainted we will send you smart, new 10K yellow gold engagement ring or wedding ring. Romance design engagement ring set with flashing, Rose cut diamond solitaire in sentimental, sweetheart mounting. Wedding ring is deeply embossed, 10K yellow gold, set with 3 genuine chip Diamonds. Either ring only $5.95 or both for $9.95 plus postage and 20% Federal tax. SEND NO MONEY with order, just name and ring size. Pay on arrival, then wear rings 10 days on money-back guarantee. Rush order now! **EMPIRE DIAMOND CO., Dept. 896-DS, Jefferson, Iowa.**

FISTULA

FREE BOOK—Explains Dangers



Anyone suffering from Fistula, Rectal Abscess, Piles or other rectal or colon troubles is invited to write today for a FREE copy of a new 122-page book telling about these ailments and related disturbances. The McCleary Clinic, 1197 Elms Blvd., Excelsior Springs, Mo.

Suffer Varicose LEG SORES?

IF you suffer pain and misery of Varicose Ulcers, or Open Leg Sores, send away at once for FREE Booklet "THE LIEPE METHODS FOR HOME USE." Tells all about this 40-year-old method, praised and endorsed by thousands. **Liepe Methods, Dept. 31-M, 3284 N. Green Bay Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.**

DETECTIVES

TRAINING—SECRET INVESTIGATIONS—FINGERPRINTS —Easy Method—Short Time. By Former Gov't Detective— Rewards. Home—Travel—Secret Code-Booklet FREE—WRITE. **INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM, 1701-T Monroe St., N. E., Washington, D. C. 18**

Write your own Future in Photography

Prepare now for a well-paid position today and a postwar career that is different, fascinating and profitable. Photography offers ever-increasing opportunities for both men and women. FREE book tells how N. Y. I. experts can quickly train you at home or thru resident, day or evening instruction in our up-to-the-minute N. Y. studios. Start now. ALL branches of black and white, motion picture and COLOR photography. Write TODAY!

New York Institute of Photography
Dept. 88 10 West 33rd Street New York 1, N. Y.

Our business is Writing high class Music for high class . . *Send yours at once. Any subject.* **SONG POEMS**

MELODY MUSIC MAKERS
168 TREMONT STREET • BOSTON 11, MASS.

PICTURE RING $1

Exquisite Onyx-like Picture Ring—made from any photo. **Send No Money!** Mail photo with paper strip for ring size. Pay postman only $1.00 plus postage. Hand tinted 25c extra. Photo returned with ring. Money back guarantee. Send photo and ring size now. **PORTRAIT RING CO., Dept. A-26, CINCINNATI, O.**

even with the men going off to war. And I certainly wouldn't recommend your just going out West looking for adventure. You're most likely to find nothing doing. If your family should move West, or go out there for a vacation, that's swell, but don't go alone!

And from a homesick waddy:

Boy, howdy, your POPULAR WESTERN is the first touch of home I've had since I left the old Boxed B. I can just see the moon over the willows back of the corral and smell the dust and hear the waddies lying. Those stories bring it all back and boy, they're swell. All I can say is thanks.—*Pfc. Albert (Curly) Walters, Somewhere-in-France.*

It isn't often that your editor gets that "good turn" feeling, but knowing that we've made a soldier out there in the battle zone feel better, kind of warms the rawhide strings of this old heart.

Happy landings, Curly, and may you soon be back on the top rail of the corral telling your pards how you helped to win the war.

Which winds up another session of the mailbox for this time, *amigos*. Keep sending your comments, suggestions and ideas in. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, POPULAR WESTERN, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

To join the POPULAR WESTERN CLUB just fill out and clip the coupon in this department and ship her to Old Doc Trail and your membership card will come back to you promptly! It's grand fun to belong and there are no dues or fees. Everybody's welcome.

So long and keep your cinch straps tight! Thanks for listening to my palaver.

THE EDITOR.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Wartime paper rationing makes it impossible to print enough copies of this magazine to meet the demand. To be sure of getting YOUR copy, place a standing order with your regular newsdealer.

DON'T TRAVEL UNLESS YOU MUST!

THE railroad and bus lines have done a magnificent job of handling the greatly increased load of wartime travel during the past three years. With reduced personnel and very little new equipment they have handled fantastic increases in passenger traffic. But the limit has been reached.

Patriotic citizens are urged to stay off the trains and buses unless their trips are necessary to the war effort or must be made because of family emergency.

General C. P. Gross, Chief of Transportation, U. S. Army, has issued the following message:

"With tremendously increased military operations in the European theater, the Army is asking the railroads to pile another miracle on the miracle they are already performing. Invasion means vastly increased military movement—two-way movement.

"We must continue to get our men and tanks and guns and ammunition from training centers and factories to points of embarkation. In addition, we must provide fast and comfortable transportation to the returning soldier, and to the casualty on his way to the hospital.

"We certainly must give that kind of traffic the right of way over anything and everything else."

What is Wrong When Prayer Fails?

Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman named Edwin J. Dingle found the answer to this question. A great mystic opened his eyes. A great change came over him. He realized the strange Power that Knowledge gives.

That Power, he says, can transform the life of anyone. Questions, whatever they are, can be answered. The problems of health, death, poverty and wrong, can be solved.

In his own case, he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as world-wide professional recognition. Thirty years ago, he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back to England to die, when a strange message came — "They are waiting for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there, under the guidance of the greatest mystic he ever encountered during his twenty-one years in the Far East. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power, which there came to him.

Within ten years, he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the World's leading geographical societies, for his work as a geographer. And today, 30 years later, he is still so athletic, capable of so much work, so young in appearance, it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send to readers of this paper a 9,000-word treatise. He says the time has come for it to be released to the Western World, and offers to send it, free of cost or obligation, to sincere readers of this notice. For your free copy, address The Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. K-280, Los Angeles 4, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free books have been printed.

MEN

This Horseshoe Ring, Handmade, Hand-engraved, inlaid with simulated pearl, is a KNOCKOUT! Shoe and shank of everlasting Monel Metal is

GUARANTEED 20 YEARS

Supply is limited . . . act now! SEND NO MONEY with order, just name and ring size. Pay on arrival, 20% tax included, ONLY $3.98, NOT one cent extra for anything! Return in five days for refund if not delighted. Address:

AMERICAN JEWELRY CO., Dept. 334-H Wheeling, W. Va

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma so terrible you choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is impossible because the struggle to breathe, if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address

Frontier Asthma Co. 424-N Frontier Bldg.
462 Niagara St. Buffalo 1, N. Y.

SONG POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Publishers need new songs! Submit one or more of your best poems for immediate consideration. Any subject. Send poem.

PHONOGRAPH RECORDS MADE

FIVE STAR MUSIC MASTERS, 611 Beacon Bldg., Boston, Mass.

USED Correspondence Courses

Complete home-study courses and self-instruction books, slightly used. Sold, rented, exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and 92-page illustrated bargain catalog FREE. Write today!

NELSON CO. 321 S. Wabash Dept. 2-06 Chicago

FREE ENLARGEMENT OF YOUR FAVORITE PHOTO

from Famous HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS

Just to get acquainted, we will make you a beautiful professional 5 x 7 enlargement FREE of any snapshot, photo or negative. Be sure to include color of hair, eyes and clothing, and get our bargain offer for having your enlargement beautifully hand-colored in oil and mounted in a handsome frame. Your original returned. Please enclose 10c for handling and mailing. Only 2 to a customer. Act Now! Offer limited to U.S.A.

HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS 7021 SANTA MONICA BLVD., Dept. 412 HOLLYWOOD 38, CALIFORNIA

OUT OF ONE ARMY and INTO ANOTHER

That's the story of many of the more than a million men who have received their honorable discharges. If you are one of them, you're interested in stepping up your "fire power" on the industrial front . . . continuing as the service man's partner in victory.

You can do that with an I. C. S. Course. At the same time you improve your chances for success in tomorrow's world . . . qualify as one of the seasoned leaders whose guidance will be needed by the boys coming back into industry after the war.

As you know, I. C. S. is helping our Armed Forces train thousands of soldiers, sailors, marines and coast guards in skilled technical work. That in addition to our regular student body of 100,000.

This wide range is made possible by courses tailored to fit the individual. Included are many technical and business subjects of special interest to disabled veterans. Cost is low and there's a discount for *all* demobilized veterans. You're in a class by yourself . . . and the experience acquired by I. C. S. in 53 years of vocational training is yours to draw upon. The coupon brings full information.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

I.C.S.

BOX 3969-B, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me booklet and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Schools
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemistry Schools
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil, Architectural and Structural Engin'g Schools
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Electrical Schools
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Power House Electrician
- ☐ Practical Electrician
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Internal Combustion Engines School
- ☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Schools
- ☐ Junior Aeronautical Engin'g
- ☐ Airplane Drafting
- ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Design
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Construction
- ☐ Ship Drafting ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steel Mill Workers
- ☐ Tool Designing
- ☐ Welding, Gas and Electric

Radio School
- ☐ Electronics ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing

Railroad School
- ☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman

Steam Engineering Schools
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines

Textile School
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Rayon Weaving
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Schools
- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Arithmetic ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ City Letter Carrier
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Illustrating
- ☐ Motor Traffic
- ☐ Post Office Clerk
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

Language School
- ☐ Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Good English

Name.....Age.....Home Address.....

City.....State.....Present Position.....Working Hours.....A.M. to.....P.M.

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England.

DISCOUNT TO DISCHARGED VETERANS; SPECIAL TUITION RATES FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

Heres the Greatest **BILLFOLD BARGAIN** *in all America*

3 BIG VALUES in ONE

All for only **$1.98**

★ **This Smart Leather Billfold and Pass Case**

★ **Your Choice of Emblems and Name Engraved on the Billfold in 23k GOLD**

★ **3-Color Identification Plate**
Beautifully Engraved with your Name, Address and Social Security Number

YOU GET THIS! Smart looking, beautifully styled Leather Billfold with Pass Case to hold membership and credit cards. Patented snap feature locks securely as currency and valuables can't fall out.

YOUR NAME ENGRAVED HERE!

Your Permanent Engraved Identification Tag.

● Rising Costs of Leather Goods may make it impossible to repeat this amazing offer!

De Luxe VALUE

Smart Leather BILLFOLD

Your Favorite Emblem, Name, Address and Social Security Number . . . *Engraved* IN GOLD! . . .

All At This One LOW PRICE

YOU GET THIS! Your choice of Emblems and your Name richly Engraved in 23k Gold on the Face of the Billfold. Your name is also engraved in Gold, inside the Billfold.

Your Favorite Emblem Here

Your Full Name Here

Here, without a doubt, is the greatest Billfold and Pass Case Bargain that you'll be likely to see for a good many years to come. Through a fortunate purchase we have a limited quantity of these smart leather Billfolds available at this low price. If you have *shopped around*, you know that it is virtually impossible to get a good leather Billfold of this type beautifully engraved in gold with your Lodge Emblem or Army, Navy, Marine or Air Corps Insignia and Name at this sensational low price. In addition we also send you a specially designed 3-color Emergency Identification Plate, on which we engrave your Social Security Number, your Name and your Address. This smart Leather Billfold must actually be seen to be fully appreciated. Besides the spacious compartment at the back which can be used for currency, checks, papers, etc., it has 4 pockets each protected by celluloid to prevent the soiling of your valuable membership and credit cards. This handsome Billfold has the sturdy appearance and style usually found in costlier Billfolds.

● Due to difficulty in obtaining good leather because of war conditions, the supply of these Billfolds is limited. Remember, you get **3 Big Values for only $1.98.** So rush your order today! If after receiving your Engraved Billfold, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you ever came across, return it and we'll refund the money.

YOU GET THIS! A beautiful 3-color Emergency Identification Plate which carries your full name, address and Social Security Number. A perfect identification record for you.

ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART
500 N. Dearborn St., Chicago 10, Ill.

Rush Your Order! OUR SUPPLY OF LEATHER BILLFOLDS IS LIMITED!

Rush this Coupon for this Once-in-a-Lifetime Bargain

ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART, Dept. 3018-A
500 N. Dearborn St., Chicago 10, Ill.

If you want a LODGE, ARMY, or NAVY INSIGNIA, state name here_____

☐ I enclose $1.98, plus new 20% Federal Tax (total $2.37). Please send me prepaid a Smart Leather Billfold with my name and favorite Emblem engraved in 23k Gold. You are also to include the Emergency Identification Plate carrying my Full Name, Address, Social Security No.

MY FULL NAME_____
(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

☐ Check here if you want us to ship the above C. O. D. for only $1.98 plus 20% Tax, postage and C. O. D. charges. ● Social Security Number_____

An LCI (Landing Craft, Infantry) storms the enemy! One of our dauntless invasion craft, the seagoing LCI is heavily armed...equipped with powerful engines pulsing with ENERGY. Fearlessly delivers troops under battle conditions.

Baby Ruth
HELPS IN ENERGY-REPLACEMENT

Our body needs replacements, too . . . it runs on food, as ship engines run on fuel. Highly nutritious food, such as Baby Ruth, answers the "call for replacements" quickly . . . for Baby Ruth Candy is rich in dextrose, used directly for body energy.

CURTISS CANDY COMPANY · CHICAGO 13, ILLINOIS
Producers of Fine Foods

Great! Cookies Made with Baby Ruth!
RECIPE ON EVERY WRAPPER

If you cannot find Baby Ruth *on the candy counter, remember Uncle Sam's needs come first with us as with you.*